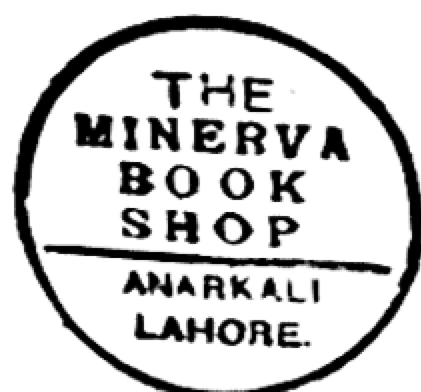



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The World's Classics

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CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

(October 1849—March 1850)

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CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By

C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by E. J. TRECHMANN



VOL. I

(*October* 1849—*March* 1850)

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
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CHARLES AUGUSTIN SAINTE-BEUVE

Born, Boulogne-sur-Mer . . . 23 December 1804
Died, Paris . . . . . 13 October 1869

The 'Causeries du Lundi', first volume, were first published in book form in 1851. In 'The World's Classics' the present translation (1909) was first published in 1933.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO MY FRIEND

AND FORMER COLLEAGUE

M. W. MacCALLUM

PROFESSOR OF MODERN LITERATURE

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

IN MEMORY OF

MANY PLEASANT MOMENTS

SPENT WITH THE

GREAT CRITIC

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was born at Boulogne-sur-mer in 1804, and died in Paris in 1869. He lost his father early; his mother was of English origin. From her he probably inherited his taste for the English descriptive and analytical poets, Cowper, Wordsworth, Shelley, whom he attempted to imitate in his first poems.

Most of his biographers connect him with the Jansenist family of the de Sainte-Beuves, and until the Revolution his father signed his name with the particle *de*, as the critic himself did during the early part of his literary career. Although that connexion has been disproved, since that family was extinct in 1711, our author has apparently lent authority to the claim by his writing of the *Histoire de Port-Royal*. After he had finished his school education, in order that he might have a regular occupation, his mother urged him to take up the study of medicine, and discouraged his literary aspirations. But he soon felt that he had no calling for the medical profession, and discontinued his studies.

Some criticisms that he wrote for the *Globe* in 1826 on Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars* and Victor Hugo's *Odes et Ballades* brought him into notice, and gained him admission into the now celebrated *cénacle*. Common literary tastes moreover, as well as the proximity of their lodgings, soon brought about an intimacy with Victor Hugo, the chief of the Romantic movement. The new school, breaking with the classical traditions, applied itself to the study of the sixteenth century poets, especially to Ronsard and the other members of the *Pléïade*, who had been neglected for two centuries. The outcome of these studies on Sainte-Beuve's part was the *Tableau historique et critique de la Poësie française et du Théâtre français au 16me siècle*. It was originally written in competition for a

prize offered by the French Academy for a work on that subject. Sainte-Beuve did not gain the prize, which was divided between Philarète Chasles and Saint-Marc Girardin; but after a complete revision and enlargement the book was published and now remains the most complete work on the subject.

His connexion with the Romantics offers some inconsistencies; he was not blind to their faults, as his criticism of the *Odes et Ballades* shows. With great acumen and rather to Hugo's disgust he pointed out all their defects; at the same time he committed all the same errors in his own poems, the first collection of which appeared anonymously as *Vie, Poésies et Pensées de Joseph Delorme* (1829), and was full of Werther moods. The faults however were the chief cause of their success.

At the Revolution of 1830 Sainte-Beuve threw himself with great ardour into all the new movements, both political and religious. In religion, he leaned to a vague kind of mysticism, or, as he himself confessed, he hovered between Catholicism, Pietism, Jansenism and Martinism.

George Sand spoke of him at this period as of a 'pious and tender dreamer', and Mme. Dorval thought him the only really good man among the apostles of the new school. From this period we have a second volume of poems, *Les Consolations* (1830), and a novel, *Volupté* (1832).

His investigation of religious questions, especially of the beliefs which accident of birth had made his, was not so much the result of actual faith as of philosophical curiosity. In the same frame of mind he wrote a third volume of poetry, *Pensées d'Août* (1837), and his *Histoire de Port-Royal* (1840–42), that complete and learned apology of Jansenism and its martyrs. This great work was the result of a course of lectures which he had been invited to deliver at Lausanne. The subject was his own choice. This was not the only occasion when he was invited outside of France: in 1848 he delivered another course at Liège on the dawn of Romanticism. The lectures were afterwards published with the title *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire* (1849). This is another complete study which leaves no room for gleaners.

Sainte-Beuve's life is made up of intellectual evolutions, in which some have detected inconsistencies. His was

a mind that was curious to get at the bottom of all ideas, and to extract their substance. He wished to know everything, all systems, poetical or religious, political or philosophical, to approach the masters, to appreciate them and their doctrines; he made himself their disciple, and felt at liberty to leave them as soon as he had analyzed them.

He is excused at each new initiation by his neophyte's fervour, by the deep respect he always had for the masters, Victor Hugo, Carrel, Lamennais, Proudhon, even after abandoning them. He justifies and characterizes himself in the following advice which he gave to a young man: 'Seek the noblest friendships and bring to them the good-will and the sincerity of an open mind, desirous before all to admire; into your criticisms, the rival and sister of your poetry, pour your effusions, your sympathy and the purest of your substance; praise and save with your words young men of talent, who meet with so much opposition at their start, and do not forsake them so long as they do not abandon the right path and fail in their promises; then be moderate and reserved towards them. Vary your studies unceasingly, cultivate your intelligence in every direction, do not confine it to a party, a school or a single idea; maintain your independence and dignity. Be ever judicious and clear-sighted even in your weaknesses, and though you do not tell the whole truth, do not tell falsehoods. Never let fatigue get the better of you; never think that you have reached your goal. At an age when others rest or slacken, redouble your courage and your ardour; begin again like a débutant, run a second and a third course, renew yourself; let truth itself profit by your illusions'.

Sainte-Beuve had his romantic phase with Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny, a mystic phase with Lamennais and Lacordaire, a phase of Jacobinism with Carrel, a phase of socialism with Proudhon; he also had a phase of Caesarism. He openly rallied to the Empire in 1852, and thereby caused a great sensation. It affected his popularity. Having been appointed professor of Latin Poetry at the Collège de France, and projected a course of lectures on Virgil, he was not able even to begin it. Hissed and howled down by the students at the opening lecture, he attempted a second with police protection, but was

obliged to yield to the evident hostility of the students. In 1857 he was appointed Maître de Conférences at the École Normale, and taught there till 1861. His attachment to the Government was rewarded with a seat in the Senate (1865). His attitude in the Senate was very dignified: he never spoke except on questions affecting the freedom of letters and thought, and always in their defence. This attitude regained him some of his lost popularity, and led to a curious incident. Having spoken in favour of Renan's appointment to a chair in the Collège de France, he was attacked by Marshal Canrobert: 'You are not here, sir, to defend a man who has denied the divinity of Jesus-Christ, and set himself up as an enemy of the religion of our fathers'. In a subsequent sitting, in a discussion of the petition sent by the schools, from the libraries of which a clerical clique had tried to exclude the works of Voltaire, Renan, Michelet and others, he energetically championed the rights of free-thought, and drew upon himself a challenge from Lacaze. Sainte-Beuve declined to settle the quarrel with any other but his natural weapon, the pen, and Lacaze was silenced.

Sainte-Beuve's critical works are very voluminous, and astonishing by reason of the vast extent and the variety of the researches and studies they required: *Portraits littéraires* (3 volumes, 1832–39), *Portraits de Femmes* (1844), *Portraits Contemporains* (5 volumes, 1846), *Causeries du Lundi* (15 volumes, 1850–57), *Nouveaux Lundis* (13 volumes, 1863–1873), altogether thirty-seven volumes, not counting the *Premiers Lundis*, a collection of rather dry articles, gathered from the *Globe* and the *National*, which added little to his reputation. His glance embraces the whole of French literature, from Villehardouin and the *Roman de Renard* to the authors of his own day, Théophile Gautier, Dumas, etc., and he made frequent excursions into foreign literatures, Italian, German and English.

No modern critic has perhaps been the object of criticism to the same extent as Sainte-Beuve; some of his judges contradict each other, as the following, by two of his countrymen, will show: 'In his too charming *Causeries* Sainte-Beuve shows himself a witty, sagacious, brilliant, iridescent, consummate, supple, shrewd, arch, sly, cunning, Attic, elegant, delicate, varied, fascinating, irresistible

writer, but he is not a serious critic'. 'I know of nothing more complete of its kind, nothing more pleasing and more serious, more moving and more charming than the indefatigable *Causeries* that every week he showers upon his public, and which he has had the happy idea of collecting in several volumes'. Matthew Arnold places him very high, and to the English reader he will be more authoritative: 'As a guide to bring us to a knowledge of the French genius and literature he is unrivalled—perfect so far as a poor mortal critic can be perfect, in knowledge of his subject, in judgment, in tact, and tone. Certain spirits are of an excellence almost ideal in certain lines; the human race might willingly adopt them as its spokesmen, recognizing that on these lines their style and utterance may stand as those, not of bounded individuals, but of the human race. So Homer speaks for the human race, and with an excellence which is ideal, in epic narration; Plato in the treatment at once beautiful and profound of philosophical questions; Shakespeare in the presentation of human character; Voltaire in light verse and ironical discussion. A list of perfect ones indeed, each in his own line! and we almost venture to add to their number, in his line of literary criticism, Sainte-Beuve."

PREFACE

I returned to Paris in September 1849 from Belgium and Liège, whither I had gone to occupy a professor's chair for a year. I sometimes think that it would be a good thing for our mind if we did something fresh every year, and treated it as a field, which is sown now with one crop, now with another. No sooner was I back in Paris when I felt a great need to be active, as one does after a solid year of study and solitude ; but I knew not how to apply my activity. M. Véron, the manager of the *Constitutionnel*, hearing of my return, was kind enough to open to me the columns of his paper for every Monday. A proposal of that nature was to me both flattering and alarming. The *Constitutionnel* counts thousands of readers, and those of a very miscellaneous kind. How could I talk pure literature and pure criticism to so large and mixed a public ? How should I manage to interest them in such a subject, especially in these times of political anxieties and storms ? I laid all my misgivings before M. Véron : he took the trouble to combat them ; he spoke to me as a man of taste with a strong appreciation for literature, and like an intelligent man who knows his public. In short he gave me reasons which convinced me. What he offered me appeared possible, and from that day, with his aid and the indulgence and good grace of the *Constitutionnel*, I resolutely plunged into the matter.

To tell the truth, this was what I had wished. I had long sought the opportunity to appear before the world as a critic, a regular critic as I understand the word, with all the maturity and perhaps too the temerity which age and experience had given me. I applied myself then for the first time to the production of fair and candid criticism, producing it in full daylight, in the open country.

Since I started in this career, already twenty-five years

ago, this is the third form that I have been led to give to my literary impressions and judgments, in accordance with the various ages and atmospheres I have passed through.

First in the *Globe*, and afterwards in the *Revue de Paris*, under the Restoration, young and a beginner, I produced a criticism that was controversial, often aggressive, at least daring, an invading criticism.

Under Louis-Philippe, during the eighteen years of that reign of a literature without initiative, and more peaceful than animated, I wrote, chiefly for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a more neutral, a more impartial, but above all analytical, *descriptive* and searching criticism. This criticism however had, as such, one fault: it was not conclusive.

The times having again become more rude, the storm and the noise of the streets forcing every one to raise his voice, and, at the same time, a recent experience having brought home more forcibly to all minds the sense of good and evil, of the just and the unjust, I thought there was room for more daring, without sinning against the proprieties, and for saying distinctly in short what appeared to me the truth about works and their authors.

The public have seemed to receive favourably this briefer and more unconstrained manner. Here then I give the articles of this year (October 1849–October 1850) without any changes. Some who have been ordinarily more severe in their judgment have been pleased to say of these articles in the *Constitutionnel*, with approval: 'He has not time to spoil them'. I accept the judgment, too happy to find in it at that price a eulogy.

December, 1850.

NOTE

THE *Constitutionnel*, in the last days of September 1849, published the following notice:

'Literature cannot die in France. It may be eclipsed for a moment, but only to reappear at the first instant of calm. One returns to it with the more attraction, because one has felt the deprivation. We believe that such is at this hour the disposition of the public mind. The lull in the political storm has sufficed to bring society back to the things that interested it in its good moments. The daily press, which follows and sometimes anticipates the tastes of the public, cannot do better here than to try to satisfy them. The *Constitutionnel* has never ceased to think of the literary interest; but it believes that the moment has come to give more prominence to it. It is besides a sign of confidence in the situation, and this journal is not afraid of showing it. M. Sainte-Beuve has undertaken, from October 1, to write a review every Monday of a serious work which is agreeable at the same time. That implies a great promise, it means that he counts upon publications that will lend themselves to that kind of criticism; it also means calling them forth. We believe that, in spite of the sterility which is complained of, such works will still be found in France. M. Sainte-Beuve, when undertaking this share of collaboration in the *Constitutionnel*, thought for his part that literature was in a hopeful state, and that there was room for exercising, conjointly with his other colleagues, a useful influence upon it. The primary condition of such an influence is to return to the charge repeatedly, to use his pen as a something living, frequent, brief, to keep himself in constant touch with the public, to consult them, to lend an ear to them, and then to make them listen to him. The time of systems is past, even in

literature. It is enough to possess good sense, but without being stale or wearisome, to take an interest in all ideas and to criticise them, or at least to chat about them freely and modestly. It is this chatty tone that we would encourage, and that M. Sainte-Beuve will try to establish between his readers and himself.'

From October 1 the articles succeeded each other every Monday, in the following order.

M. SAINT-MARC GIRARDIN

Monday, October 1, 1849.

THE pages of the journalist are volatile; the words scattered during long years by the professor are in danger of being lost. Equally distinguished as a professor and a journalist, a man of intellect in all its forms, M. Saint-Marc Girardin has carefully collected some of his best words and his best pages in the pleasing volumes he publishes to-day.

It is quite eighteen years since he first mounted the professorial chair, if we may call by that solemn name the place where he talks so familiarly and so easily. He seems from the first to have adopted for his motto the words of Vauvenargues: 'Familiarity is the apprenticeship of minds'. In his advice to a young man, Vauvenargues, developing this same thought, said again: 'Cherish familiarity, my dear friend; it makes the mind flexible, delicate, modest, tractable, it disconcerts vanity, and imparts, under an appearance of freedom and openness, a wisdom which is not founded on the illusions of the mind, but on the indubitable principles of experience. Those who do not come out of themselves are all of a piece'. M. Saint-Marc Girardin practised on his own behalf this just advice, and preached by example. With his animated, flexible, delicate speech he visited the minds of his hearers, drew them towards him, encouraged them to develop freely, naturally, without any wrong bent and without bombast. The moment when he began to lecture coincided with the retirement of the three eloquent professors, MM. Guizot, Cousin and Villemain, which caused as it were a great silence. There were two ways of break-

[1] *Cours de Littérature Dramatique*, par M. Saint-Marc Girardin (2 vols.); *Essais de Littérature et de Morale*, par le même (2 vols.).

ing this silence, one was to be loud and declamatory, the other was to talk without ostentation or pretension. Address, wisdom, good taste, all counselled the latter course; and in following it M. Saint-Marc Girardin at the same time followed his natural bent.

In mind and heart he is naturally moderate, and I have never seen him exhibit passion. This gives a great advantage and a great start even to a young man. Pascal remarked in his time that 'a great advantage is *quality* (birth), which, by the time a man reaches eighteen or twenty, puts him in the way of being known and respected as another might be at fifty, on his own merits: thirty years are thus gained without any trouble'. I know not if this has ceased to be true now that we flatter ourselves that we have abolished birth distinctions; it seems to me that the sons of persons in a high position, that historical names still have at least ten years' start of the others at the beginning of their career. Well! in respect of the things of the intellect and of experience, to be without passion in one's youth gives one ten or fifteen years' start in the race for maturity. The passions exaggerate the outlook of things even in the best minds; they turn us out of our path, they waste our time; a man has judgment, but he suspends it on those occasions when it stands in his way; he has a sense of the ridiculous, but he stifles it under a certain seductive warmth of enthusiasm. He is impetuous, he becomes entangled, and it is difficult afterwards to retrace his steps. This has never been the case with M. Saint-Marc Girardin; he was struck at the very first by the faults, the eccentricities, the absurdities of the time, he laughed at them, he ridiculed them from the point of view of serious and piquant reason; he profited by all he saw, by all he read, to devote himself to the game in which his mind delights above all and excels, to moralizings.

The title, the subject, of his Course of lectures, is French *poetry* This word he has purposely refrained from using in the sense in which a lover of the moderns would probably have used it. Lyric poetry, that happy branch which does most honour to the great talents of our age, has occupied him very little. He would be inclined to say with a certain person in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*: 'Here are the dramatic poets, who, in my opinion,

are the poets par excellence, and the masters of the passions. . . . Here are the lyrics, whom I despise as much as I esteem the others, and who make of their art a harmonious extravagance'. That certainly denotes a lacuna in M. Saint-Marc Girardin's manner of understanding and presenting poetry. With his wit and his adroitness, he hides this gap to the best of his power. But in vain, the absence of love and home makes itself felt on one point. He does not like pure poetry, poetry in the state of reverie or fantasy. In his youth he liked it still less, if that were possible. When I said that he had never had a passion or an excess, I was going too fast: he had at one moment an excess of reason; this lyric poetry, then young and flourishing, he denied, he scoffed at, if we remember right, and when he happened to notice it, treated it with irony. Now that it is beyond dispute and three parts established, he contents himself with not combating it; he tolerates it. The force of his gifted criticism is concentrated upon the drama, and from this side he vanquishes the moderns. Himself beaten on one point, on lyric poetry, he has said nothing about it, and gaily led his troops to victory against the other wing. M. Saint-Marc Girardin has been so often right in his criticisms against the moderns, that he must excuse me for reminding him that he has not alway been in the right. It would be too humiliating for us and for all, to have a critic in these days who is always right. The Athenian peasant did not pardon it in Aristides; I cannot let it pass in M. Saint-Marc Girardin.

I know very well what this man of wit might reply and what he has already replied. He will borrow the words of Fénelon, whom he so loves to quote; he will say that it is not by any means lyric poetry in itself that he condemns, but the abuse of it, and the luxuriance of images in which it loses itself: 'An author who is too clever, and is always striving to be so, said Fénelon, wearies and exhausts my intellect: I do not pretend to so much wit. If he would show less, he would leave me breathing time, and give me more pleasure: he holds my mind too much on the stretch; the reading of his lines becomes a study. So many flashes dazzle me; I like a soft light to soothe my weak eyes. I want a pleasing poet, suited to the average of men, who will do everything

for them, nothing for himself. I want a sublimity so familiar, so pleasing and so simple, that every one is at once tempted to believe that he could have found it himself without any trouble, although few men are capable of finding it. I prefer the pleasing to the surprising and the marvellous. . . .' That is what M. Saint-Marc Girardin will say with Fénelon ; and he might also reply in the words of Voltaire, for I like to let these excellent minds speak ; all the true art of French rhetoric, the natural art of rhetoric, is scattered about in their writings ; it is merely a question of gathering it. I will suppose, then, that M. Saint-Marc Girardin, to excuse himself for not admiring the lyrics of the moderns, might again reply in these words of Voltaire, which agree so well with those of Fénelon : 'The great art, it appears to me, is to rise from the familiar to the heroic, and to descend again with delicate shades. Woe to any work of this kind that is always serious, always grand ! it will weary : it will be nothing but declamation. We want naïve paintings ; we want variety ; we want something simple, elevated, pleasing. I do not mean to say that I have all this, but I would like to have it ; and he who attains to it shall be my friend and master'. These last words make us feel that it is indeed Voltaire who is speaking, that is to say a poet in love with his art, who, in a moment of admiration, would be capable of applauding even his rival, of falling upon his neck and embracing him. Now, shall I say it ? it is this movement proper to the poet that I never see in our clever critic. Anacreon says somewhere that there is a little mark, an indescribable something, by which we may recognize a lover : this indescribable something is lacking in M. Saint-Marc Gerardin with respect to pure poetry, lyrical poetry.

But dramatic poetry, the poetry which represents the passions of the human heart in conflict, in the divers classes of society, he courts and enjoys ; he loves to discourse upon it, and he finds the most ingenious and unexpected things to say about it, no less correct for being unexpected. The two volumes of his Course, which treat of the *Use of the Passions in Drama*, are composed of a series of chapters, each of which is more curious and varied than the other. He makes happy divisions in his subject, he approaches it from new and bold points

of view, which show its protracted veins. Thus, taking one by one the different sentiments, the different passions which may serve as moving springs in drama, he writes the history of it among the Greeks, the Latins, the moderns, before and after Christianity: 'Each sentiment, he says, has its history, and this history is curious, because it is, so to say, an abrégé of the history of humanity'. M. de Chateaubriand was the first in France to set the example of this form of criticism; in his *Génie du Christianisme*, which is so far from being a good work, but which has opened out so many views, he chooses the principal sentiments of the human heart, the characters of father, mother, husband and wife, and traces the expression of them among ancients and moderns, striving to prove the superior moral quality which Christianity has introduced into them, and which, in his opinion, should profit poetry. This latter point alone is contestable, and should be systematically investigated. M. de Chateaubriand's conclusions are consequently rather in favour of the moderns, and those of M. Saint-Marc Girardin are almost always unfavourable to them. With that exception the process of reasoning is the same; but the latter, the man of wit, has greatly developed it, and made a novel application of it; he has made it quite original and his own. The scale he runs through is very extensive, and comprises all the varieties carried even to contrast in the course of one and the same sentiment. And, for example, he will pass in the twinkling of an eye from the *Œdipus* or *King Lear* to a scene in *Père Goriot*, or again from a heavy father in Terence to a parable in the Gospel. Is it a question of painting man's struggle with danger? it is only a hand's length, for him, from Ulysses to Robinson Crusoe; he remembers Paul's storm in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and carries us back to the burning of the *Kent*, a vessel of the East India Company, in 1825. Moral reflexions, keen and penetrating, on the difference of times and civilizations, are brought in to animate and save these abrupt transitions: one is never for a moment in danger of being bored. Whilst others play upon the antitheses of words, M. Saint-Marc Girardin delights in moral antitheses, and strikes ideas out of them. In this respect his criticism is full of invention and fertility. There are some altogether fine and serious parts, where

he speaks of Greek antiquity and the personages in Homer and Sophocles, or again when he approaches that other Christian antiquity of Augustine and Chrysostome; these exhibit the master in his elevation and gravity, and redeem a few errors.

There are errors, indeed. M. Saint-Marc Girardin is too much an enemy of insipidity to expect us to confine ourselves to continuous praise of him. If I might venture to borrow his own language or at least try to apply his own method, in order to characterize him, I should do it in this way. Ordinarily, when he wishes to triumph upon a particular line, like a skilful tactician he chooses his points. He borrows his terms of comparison from the Greeks, from the Latins, from the age of Louis XIV; and in the end he comes to the moderns, to his contemporaries, he vanquishes them by showing them to be inferior, in spite of their wit, to those more natural and graver masters. Now here, in criticism, this is what we might say to him, and what he might say to himself much better than we could, if he would add this little chapter to all his own.

Criticism with the ancients, he would remark, was itself grave and serious. In criticism, as in morality, the ancients discovered all the great laws: the moderns, as a rule, have only ingeniously improved upon the details. Where can we find a more exact and sovereign classifier than Aristotle? There we have the analysis and almost the law of literature in its rigorous perfection and its excellence. Criticism became a judgment seat to such a degree, that to some its decrees became quite a religion. Even in the decline of art, rhetoricians such as Longinus (or the man designated by that name) have a severe correctness and admirable developments. The criticism of detail, in what concerned the smallest artifices of style and diction, assumed with the ancients an importance which nobody dreamed of making light of. The name of Aristarchus, the master of this kind of grammatical sagacity, came into circulation as a type, and stands for the very oracle of taste. This respectful tradition of criticism we find again entire among the Latins. In the intervals of public functions, in the brief respites from civil storms, Cicero did not think it derogatory to write treatises on Rhetoric. Horace, in his verses, summed

up the whole substance and the flower of ancient criticism; like a real bee that he was, he transformed it into a honey as pleasant as it was nutritious. Even when the decline of taste is already advanced, when Tacitus (or some other) wrote that *Dialogue of the Orators*, in which all opinions, even those of the Romantics of the time, are stated, charm and mockery did no prejudice to the serious; no system is sacrificed in this excellent dialogue, and each side of the question is defended by turns with the best and most valid reasons. The name of Quintilian suffices to express, in the order of criticism, the model of the scrupulous, the serious, the careful, the very idea of judgment. But in passing to the modern rhetoricians, to those of the good and great periods, we come down from a height: in these fine epochs, criticism did not develop and soar as it should have done, it is often content with merely following: however, in one or two cases it directs and guides even; it seems to recover its old authority. Boileau is a forerunner of Rollin. And on the latter, on his judicial candour and modesty, on the honesty of his literary method, and on Fénelon and Voltaire, taking them both as mere critics and men of taste, what could we not say? Observe that I am now sketching only a very little chapter, such as M. Saint-Marc Girardin could fill in much better without insisting as much as I do on the transitions. I should come, then, as he loves to do, to the moderns of to-day, to contemporaries, to ourselves, and I should say: Criticism seems, at first glance, to have made much progress, to have made as much progress as art has made little; it seems to have gained what the other has lost. Let us not, however, be led astray by these apparent advantages. And then I might take as an example M. Saint-Marc Girardin himself, that is to say one of the most brilliant modern examples, one of the most reasonable, and I should say: A man always belongs to his time. The moderns may do what they please, they are still the moderns. The man who speaks against super-refinement is often himself slightly super-refined, or, if he returns to the simple, he does so by strength of wit, address and intelligence. I have sometimes heard say of certain great minds of our days that they had none of the characteristics of their time, M. Royer-Collard for example: 'He has nothing

of this time, they said; turn of thought and style, he belongs to quite another epoch'. Pardon me! I replied; M. Royer-Collard, just like M. Ingres, is still of this time, if only in respect of his continual efforts to get away from it. The style of both is *marked*; Nicole and Raphaël once proceeded more evenly. A man is in touch with his time, and very much so even when he resists it. M. Saint-Marc Girardin will excuse me then if, placing him beside these two fine names, I tell him that he also belongs to his time, and if I try to find in him the mark of it. I shall find it, this mark, in his very method. It is not simple enough, not connected enough; it makes too much way in a short time; like the drama of the Romantics it is perpetually changing before our eyes. It disguises the restlessness peculiar to the moderns behind a mobility, behind a brisk and graceful agility. What he says is shrewd, generally judicious, but he says it in a sparkling manner. That is the weak spot of the man who is so well able to point out the weak spots on others' armour. He has beginnings of chapters, perfect in tone, in manner, in seriousness, of an elevated criticism; then he descends, or rather rushes and leaps to quite opposite points of view. 'But that is not my fault, the critic will say; I do not invent my subject, I am obliged to descend its slope, and to follow the moderns into those recesses of the human heart into which they plunge, after the simple sentiments are exhausted'. Pardon me! I shall reply again; your ingenious criticism, in doing that, does not merely obey a necessity, it indulges a taste and a pleasure; it feels marvellously comfortable in those recesses which it reveals, and of which, in a playful way, it makes us feel the emptiness and the falsity. If these authors, who appear to have been brought into the world for the express purpose of procuring it an easy triumph, did not exist, your criticism would be greatly at a loss, and would not find all its subject-matter. It needs them to enable it to put on all its originality and all its piquancy, to enliven, at the right moment, its seriousness, which, if protracted, might turn to subtlety. That is what I call the modern mark in M. Saint-Marc Girardin. In a single one of his chapters there is a prodigious number of ideas, views, observations, many more doubtless than there are in a like number of pages of Quintilian or Longinus;

but there is also bel-esprit. I should be at a loss perhaps to place my finger upon the precise spot, but it is scattered throughout the whole. The title of certain chapters is in itself an epigram ; these chapters, begun with gravity, often end in a point. With the mere addition of a certain tone, they would turn to positive persiflage. At all events there is a jingle of comparisons. That is where, though in parts elevated, serious, eloquent, M. Saint-Marc Girardin is himself essentially modern.

Where he appears to me entirely at home and in his element, without effort, with a good grace and an entirely natural measure of tone, is when he speaks of comedy, especially of the Middle comedy. There is gaity in his wit, something light and amusing ; he knows all the refinements of the heart and the nuances of society. He has written, apropos of a comedy of Collé and of Piron's *Métromanie*, some charming, delicate pages, which I esteem more highly as real testimony of his talent than other more prominent ones in which he raises his voice. They are little master-pieces of temperate criticism. There are also some very fine pages in the order of moral criticism, as when he comments on the parable of the Prodigal Son, and brings in for comparison the fathers of Terence's comedies. M. Saint-Marc Girardin is fond of drawing upon Scripture for moral examples and maxims, and he gives a delightful seasoning to his teachings. I have known nobody who understood St. Paul so well and was at the same time able to enjoy Collé.

M. Saint-Marc Girardin's influence upon young men has been real, and deserves to be noted. An enemy of pomposity and of grand airs, he has helped to unmask many vices of declamation in vogue in his time ; he has pricked many a bladder. But he is above all one of those who have most contributed towards curing the young generation of the *malady of René*. What is this malady ? M. Saint-Marc Girardin has defined it many a time and combatted it in all its forms ; he met with it and described it with a particularly striking expression in a young man, by name *Stagyre*, to whom St. John Chrysostome in his time gave good counsel, and who was supposed to be possessed of a devil ; this Stagyre is the first recognizable type of the family of the Renés and Werthers. M. Saint-Marc Gerardin in a sense discovered

this Stagyre, and in his turn spoke many hard truths to him, which politeness prevented him at that time from telling René to his face. Stagyre's devil, or what comes to the same thing, René's evil, is disgust with life, inaction and the abuse of reverie, a proud feeling of isolation, of thinking oneself misunderstood, of despising the world and the beaten tracks, of judging them unworthy of oneself, of esteeming oneself the most desolate of men, and of loving one's own melancholy; the last stage of this evil would be suicide. Few people in our days have committed suicide, in comparison with the number of those who have threatened to do so. But we have all, at a certain time of our lives, been more or less attacked by René's malady. M. Saint-Marc Girardin, who was always exempt from it, has hit off its disastrous effects and its absurdities; he has spared no pains to make young men disgusted with it, and he has succeeded. He has not ceased to repeat in every tone, in a tone of mockery as well as in a tone of affection: 'Do not think yourselves superior to others; accept common life; do not sneer at petty morality, it is the only good one. Stagyre's demon is melancholy, or rather a want of energy and backbone, it is the negation of the soul. In order to get away from it, esteem regular and simple habits, every-day duties and interests, above all kinds of pleasures. Adopt a profession, marry and get a family. There is no demon, indeed, though it were the demon of melancholy itself, that will dare to face the presence of little children'. In such and still better terms (for I am obliged to abridge) has M. Saint-Marc Girardin for nearly eighteen years been preaching marriage to the younger generation, regularity in the beaten tracks, the love of the high roads: 'The high roads, he exclaimed one day, I will not speak ill of them, I adore them'. I have said that he was successful, too successful indeed. The younger generation, a part of them, have become positive; they have given up dreaming; as soon as they are sixteen they think of their career and all that may lead up to it; they do nothing useless. The mania and the emulation of all the Renés and all the Chattertons of our time was to be a great poet or to die. The dream of the young wiseacres of to-day is to live, to be a prefect at twenty-five, or a delegate, or a minister. The evil

has merely changed and shifted. That is what happens with all the maladies of the human mind which we flatter ourselves to have cured. They are repercussed, as they say in medicine, and others are substituted. M. Saint-Marc Girardin, who knows human nature so well, knows that better than we do.

M. DE LAMARTINE[1]

Monday, October 8, 1849.

AND why should I not speak of him? I know the difficulties of speaking fittingly about him: the time of illusions and indulgence is past; it is absolutely necessary to speak truths, and that may appear cruel, so well chosen is the moment. However, because a man like M. de Lamartine has thought fit not to close the year 1848 without giving to the public his young man's confessions and crowning his statesmanship with idylls, must criticism hesitate to follow him and say what it thinks of his book, giving proof of a discretion and modesty which nobody (and least of all the author) pays any heed to? I will take the book, then, in itself; I will isolate it as much as possible from politics; forgetting the Lamartine of these latter years, I will try to remember only the pre-*Girondists* Lamartine. In fact, speaking from a literary point of view, this volume of *Confidences* comes after *Jocelyn, la Chute d'un Ange, les Recueillements poétiques*, and is a continuation, without too much falling off, of that series of publications in which the faults of the author gradually become more and more exaggerated, without the good qualities disappearing.

The book begins with a preface in form of a letter to a friend; the object of this apologetic preface is to excuse the author, who feels, after all, the impropriety of a romantic publication in the serious circumstances in which he has placed himself, and in which he has done his best to place his country. The poet has the gift of tears; he sheds a few to try to move our hearts. It was a question with him of selling Milly, his native domain, the seat of the family tombs, or of selling his manuscript of the

[1] *The Confidences.* By M. de Lamartine (1 vol., October).

Confidences. At the last moment, and out of respect, he says, for the shades of his mother, of his father, of his sisters, he did not hesitate : ' The deed was on the table. With one word I was about to alienate for ever this part of my eyes (Milly). My hand trembled, my eyes were dimmed, my *heart* failed me. . . . On the one hand I weighed the grief of seeing indifferent eyes perusing the palpitating fibres of my *heart* laid bare before unsympathetic looks ; on the other, the rending of this *heart*, a piece of which the document was going to detach by my own hand. I had to make a sacrifice of vanity or a sacrifice of feeling. I covered my eyes with my hand, and made the choice with my *heart*. . . .' I know nothing more dreary than this lavish display of heart which is scattered over the whole of this preface, under pretence of covering what the author thereby only uncovers. Since it was necessary to come to a painful decision, a brief, clear and simple preface would have been much more fitting, and it would have convinced us more really of his inward struggle.

The author has just told us that in publishing the *Confidences* he sacrificed vanity to feeling. In speaking thus, he rather exaggerates to himself the sacrifice ; his vanity, indeed, as we shall see, does not suffer in the least throughout the book ' Mon Dieu ! he exclaims at the beginning, I have often regretted that I was born ; I have often desired to relapse into annihilation, instead of advancing through so many falsehoods, so many sufferings, so many successive losses, towards that loss of ourselves which we call death ! ' There is a gloomy outburst which we might imagine to be borrowed from René. M. de Lamartine, whose habitual disposition is rather contentment and serenity, quickly returns to his true nature, when he describes to us his free and easy childhood, his happy growth under the tenderest and most distinguished of mothers : ' By God's grace I was born in one of those families of predilection which are, as it were, a sanctuary of piety. . . . If I had to be born again on this earth, it is there that I should wish to be born ' He would be very wrong, indeed, and very unjust if he thought he had any complaint against fate at his entry into life. Never was any creature more blessed : every gift fell to his share, even happiness ; it makes us believe that all the fairies assisted at his birth, all, with the exception of one, the

least brilliant, whose absence is not felt till later in life, as one advances in years. What had she then at the bottom of her box, that absent fairy who was the only one to fail M. de Lamartine ? I shall say presently, if I dare ; but the poet certainly does not believe that she was missing.

He himself complacently enumerates all the qualities and graces with which he was clothed. 'Thy boy is very handsome for the son of an aristocrat', a man of the people one day said to his mother. His early education was quite maternal, quite free, quite open-air. 'This *régime*, he says, was wonderfully successful in my case, and I was *one of the handsomest children* that ever trod barefoot the stones of our mountains, where the human race is yet so healthy and so handsome. Eyes of a *black blue* like my mother's ; features accentuated, but softened by a somewhat pensive expression, like hers ; a dazzling ray of inward joy lighting up this whole face ; *very supple* and *very fine* hair, of a golden brown like the ripe shell of the chestnut, falling in waves rather than curls over my sunburnt neck (I will omit, with the author's pardon, a few details on the delicacy of his skin). . . . Altogether, the image of my mother with a manly accent in the expression : that is the child I was then. Happy in form, happy of heart, happy of character, life had written happiness, strength and health on my whole being'. And further on he says, when leaving the maternal roof for college : 'I resembled a statue of Adolescence removed for a moment from the shelter of altars *to be shown as a model for young men*'. All this must have been very correct, very faithful ; only it is a pity that it is the original who thus makes himself his own sculptor and his own painter. M. de Lamartine will answer that Raphaël painted his own portrait. I might reply in my turn that a writer, to paint himself, needs more moral labour, more reflexion and premeditation than the painter properly speaking, and that as soon as the moral enters, a different order of delicacy begins. M. de Lamartine praises his mother highly ; nothing more natural at first sight ; a father and mother are among those beings whom one cannot perhaps praise or at least love too much. But here again there is a shade of delicacy. To praise one's mother every moment as a woman of genius, as a model of expressive sensibility and beauty, take care, that is already a little in the nature of

self-praise, especially when the conclusion to be drawn from all these praises is that one is in person her living image. Oh! how much better the younger Racine, brought up in the purity and religion of the domestic hearth, understood that modesty which goes with all true piety! He hesitates to utter aloud the illustrious name of his father, that name which was his own—

> Virgile, qui d'Homère appris à nous charmer,
> Boileau, Corneille, *et Toi que je n'ose nommer*,
> Vos esprits n'étaient-ils qu'étincelle légère?

Here we touch upon an essential defect in the education of M. de Lamartine, an error of that excellent mother who, nourished upon Jean-Jacques and Bernardin whose systems she associated with her beliefs, tried to bring up her son with the aid of sentiment alone. At no moment, indeed, does rule interfere in this education which is left to pure affection: 'My education was entirely in the more or less serene eyes and the more or less open smile of my mother. . . . She expected nothing of me except to be pure and good. It gave me no trouble to be that. . . . My soul, which breathed only goodness, could not produce anything else. I never had occasion to struggle either with myself or anybody else. Everything attracted me, nothing constrained me'. It was this restriction, this *veto* with which his childhood never came into collision, that was lacking in M. de Lamartine's education, and which he only encountered very late in life. Even when childhood was past and during the whole of youth, this favoured nature continued to expand without ever coming face to face with a warning obstacle. The world at first treated him as his family had done: he had been the spoiled child of his mother, he became the spoiled child of France and the rising generation. His facile, abundant, harmonious genius poured itself out without economy at the pleasure of all his dreams. Thus he continually spent the richest gifts, without being warned to husband them, until he had nearly squandered them all—yes, all, except that gift of speech which appears unquenchable in him, and on which he will play to the very last as on an enchanted flute. In order to picture to myself M. de Lamartine and his errors without doing him too much wrong, I have sometimes wondered how a François de

Sales or a Fénelon, one of those elect natures, would have turned out, if he had had no education, had known no rule, and had indulged every whim. A Fénelon, spoiled and unrestrained, a sort of half-mystic Ovid, speaking of heaven and occupied with earth, did you ever imagine a combination of the kind ?

Independently of education, however, there must have been something else lacking in this nature and this mind otherwise so gifted ; for when a quality is rather strongly developed in us, it will sooner or later show itself, and dispense after all with education. This brings us back to the absent fairy, the only one, as we have said, who failed to put in an appearance at the poet's cradle. Let us see if he does not himself, in the ingenuousness of his confessions, put us on the track to discover her. Among the authors he reads at first and whom he loves, we find Tasso, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Ossian ; this is quite natural, and the affinity of natures, the kinship of genius, declares itself. But this young mind, open to all, enamoured of all, repels a single book among those that are put into his hands ; he has an instinctive aversion. And for whom, if you please ? for La Fontaine. 'La Fontaine's fables, he says, appeared to me at once puerile, false and cruel, and I could never learn them by heart'. It reassures me to hear that M. de Lamartine has never had a liking for La Fontaine, and now I am confirmed in my secret judgment. For, after all, I can imagine a nature so Platonic turning his back on Rabelais and even appearing to despise Montaigne, and these disdainful words mean nothing if not : I resemble them in no way. But La Fontaine ! here was a dreamer like himself, enamoured like himself of solitude, of the silence of the woods, of the charm of melancholy, and doting at times on Plato. What else had this dreamer to displease him so ? In spite of his dreaminess he had experience, the sense of reality, good sense. It was he who, in the fable of the *Shepherd who became a Minister*, said, in order to explain how the poor man, suddenly called away from his flock to govern a State, acquits himself better than one could have expected—

Il avait du bon sens, le reste vient ensuite.

That fairy, who was missing at the poet's cradle, was she

not simply the fairy who had endowed the Shepherd of the fable, the fairy of good sense, of the sense of reality? M. de Lamartine assuredly does not think so, for he tells us, speaking of his precocious development: 'This entirely rustic life, and this absolute ignorance of what other children know at that age, did not, in respect of sentiments and ideas, prevent this homely education, watched over by my mother, from making of me *one of the justest minds*, one of the most loving hearts, etc., etc.' That is clear enough, and on this point too we are forced to call aloud to him: *Stop!* I understand by good sense, mark it well, not the vulgar good sense, but tact, the spirit of conduct, good taste, many things at the same time, in a word, a well-regulated and balanced mind in its most varied and most delicate applications.

And, for example, without going outside of the *Confidences*, in the order of the things of taste and feeling, what does M. de Lamartine do when speaking of his mother? He is not satisfied with painting her, he describes her. To describe with such manifest self-satisfaction a person who stands so near to us, and whom we have so many chances of resembling, is in itself a want of tact in so delicate a matter. But in what terms does he describe her? In one place we read, 'One finds in her that inward smile of life, that unquenchable tenderness of soul and glance, and above all that ray of light so serene in its reasonableness, so *steeped* in sensibility, which *streamed like an eternal caress* from her eye, which was deep and veiled, as if she did not wish to shoot out all the brightness and all the love she had in her beautiful eyes'. Again, 'Her features are so delicate, her black eyes have so innocent and so penetrating a glance; *her transparent skin shows so strongly through its somewhat pale tissue the blue of the veins* and the mobile blush of her slightest emotions; her hair, very black but very fine, falls *with so many waves and such silky curves* down her cheeks *even to her shoulders*, that it is impossible to say whether she is eighteen or thirty'. A gifted novelist, who has in our day invented a style of his own, M. de Balzac, has also described the woman of thirty, and that with features not more select nor more deliciously disposed; but, when he described her, he was not describing his mother. Do you not feel the difference? 'At the mere sight of this portrait, says

M. de Lamartine, one can understand all the passion which such a woman must have inspired in my father, and all the piety which afterwards she must have inspired in her children '. Yes, one understands the passion, but not the piety. Piety, chaste, holy, truly filial piety, does not analyse in that way. Telling of his father's imprisonment during the Reign of Terror, M. de Lamartine makes us witnesses of scenes a little bit romantic, and these he must permit me to believe with reservation ; for he was too young to observe them at the time, and certainly neither of the two principals can have told him all the details he gives us to-day. According to him, by means of a cord attached to an arrow and shot from one roof to the other, his father and mother corresponded, and his father could even sometimes leave his prison at night, and spend a few hours with her. ' What nights, exclaims the poet, those furtive nights spent in arresting the hours in the bosom of all one loves ! A few steps away, sentinels, bars, dungeons and death ! They did not, like Romeo and Juliet, count the steps of the stars in the night by the song of the nightingale and the lark, but by the noise of the sentries going their round. . . .' The poet goes on working himself up to an excitement about those *delicious* nights, those *interviews of two lovers*, and trying to interest us in them. He appears to have completely forgotten that he is a son, and is telling of his father and mother. All this is offensive in the last degree, and so indelicate, that it is almost an indelicacy in the critic himself to notice it. 'To have taste we must have a soul ', said Vauvenargues ; but as there can be no doubt about a soul in such a subject, I will content myself with saying that this violation of taste and propriety comes from a lack of original balance which education did nothing to correct.

It would be a mistake to believe that, amidst these offensive faults, there are not after all some charming details, and a thousand happy retrospects in which the poet delights and again finds his light touch. At the very moment when we begin to lose hope and patience, his talent will suddenly reappear, lively, facile, full of freshness, and we again become friends with him. Only as the volume advances, however, does the writer to a slight extent throw off his wordiness, what I will call the rhetoric of sentiment. This rhetoric, which cannot be confounded

with poetry without profaning the latter name, is marked by a singular habit, by what we may call a *trick* which in the end becomes wearisome. In the novel *Adèle de Sénange* appears a character who never speaks without placing three almost synonymous words one after the other, who never greets you, for instance, without entreating you to count on his *deference*, his *regards*, his *consideration*. M. de Lamartine, without being conscious of it, has likewise adopted the habit of cutting up his thought, his sentence into three members, of proceeding by triplets. Having once made this observation, we have occasion to verify it on many a page of the *Confidences*. If the poet reopens his family manuscript, it is to *find again*, *see again*, *hear* the soul of his mother. If he wishes us to mourn for Milly, it is on account of the tender images which have *peopled*, *animated*, *enchanted* that estate ; he wraps himself up in this *soil*, these *trees*, these *plants*, born with him ; he returns to visit his *souvenirs*, his *apparitions*, his *regrets*. This abundant and monotonous phraseology ends by fatiguing even those who most delighted in being lulled by the poet's beautiful language. Those especially who know his poetry by heart (and their number is great among the men of our age) find, not without regret, whole shreds of it scattered over and, as it were, drowned in his prose. This prose, in the *Confidences*, is too often merely a paraphrase of his poetry, which itself towards the end has become the paraphrase of his feelings.

The volume only assumes its full interest after the Lucy episode, and this interest is carried on to the end of the Graziella episode. That first love with Lucy, under Ossian's invocation, is a pretty sketch, of a pure, simple and delicate touch : it has a smiling archness, in a word, those qualities which M. de Lamartine's talent is easily tempted to exaggerate, but which one encounters with the more pleasure in him. The journey from the North to the South shows sensibility ; we make it in company with the piquante singer Camilla. The Ossianic cloud is gradually dispersed by the Italian sun ; Roman beauty outlines itself. Camilla forms a transition between Lucy and Graziella. The latter is the true heroine of the *Confidences*.

In the Graziella episode are some passages which are treated in a superior manner and in which we

recognize a true picturesqueness, not too much mingled with spurious description, a keen feeling for nature and the human state. In taking the precaution of putting the date 1829 at the close of this episode, M. de Lamartine wished us to understand that he wrote it at that epoch, and that the lines he devoted to the young Neapolitan girl in 1830 only came after, as a crown. Although this Graziella episode is written with more vigour and simplicity than the rest of the *Confidences*, we still find in it some of those discordant and forced notes, which M. de Lamartine did not as yet admit into his manner at that date of 1829; we begin to doubt this date; and indeed the author himself, who has his moments of forgetfulness, tells us, in his preface to the same *Confidences*, that it was in 1834, at Ischia, at the time he was composing his *Histoire des Girondins*, that he wrote this Graziella episode as an interlude. If he tells the truth in his preface, he has, then, permitted himself a slight supposition in the body of the book. But it matters little, and the poet has had, in his life, many other more serious lapses of memory. The only inference I wish to draw from this recent date is quite literary; it bears upon a fault which henceforth affects M. de Lamartine's manner, even in his best moments. I would like here to make this defect felt, to make it palpable.

Among the authors who had the greatest influence upon M. de Lamartine, and the earliest action upon his form of imagination, we must place in the first rank Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. The poet of the *Harmonies* and of *Jocelyn* manifestly proceeds from him; he loses no opportunity of admitting him to be his master, and of celebrating him. *Paul and Virginia* was his favourite book from early childhood. One of the happiest passages in the Graziella episode is that where the poet, sheltered in the bosom of that family of fisher-folk, after the storm which has cast him upon the island of Procida, begins to read and translate to these poor people, during the evenings, some of the books he has saved from the wreck. He has three volumes in all: one is the novel *Jacopo Ortis*; the second is a volume of Tacitus (the poet at this time never went out without a Tacitus, in prevision of his future destinies); lastly, the third volume is *Paul and Virginia*. The poet tries in vain to make these good people, who are so near

to nature, understand the grief of Jacopo Ortis, and the indignation of Tacitus; he only wearies and astonishes them. But *Paul and Virginia*! hardly has he begun to translate it to them, when the scene instantly changes, their faces light up, all assume an attentive and devout expression, sure sign of the heart's emotion. The natural note is struck; tears flow; every one shares the emotion. The poor Graziella especially imbibes from this charming reading of the innocent book the poison which kills her. There is an admirable analysis of *Paul and Virginia*, an analysis in groups and in action, such as a poet alone could have made. Well! this flame of a passion which is kindled by the other, this romance which is to be the outcome of a romance, has it the same purity, the same simplicity of expression? On this point, I venture in my turn, with *Paul and Virginia* in my hand, to read M. de Lamartine a lesson, and to call him to account for what he has just now taught me so well to feel. His manner, which we have known so noble at the beginning, a little vague, but pure, has deteriorated; at every turn it belies his first examples and his models. Would Bernardin de Saint-Pierre have said, in order to express the ease with which friendships are formed and cordial relations established among simple folk: 'The time required for the formation of intimate friendships in the higher classes is not necessary among the lower. Hearts open without distrust, they are *welded* at once. . . .' Again, in that scene, pretty by the way, where Graziella, to please the man she loves, tries on the dress of a Parisian lady of fashion, would Bernardin say, after the numberless details of an entirely physical description: 'Her feet, accustomed to be bare or boxed up in roomy Greek slippers, *distorted* the satin of the shoes. . . .' This fault, of which I only mention a few examples, is henceforth almost incessant in M. de Lamartine; it stands out and reappears in the best passages. Now he speaks of an *extravasated* existence; now, reading Ossian, he feels his tears *congealing* on the fringe of his eyelids. He has not simply a love, but a *frenzy* for nature. The tones of a guitar make the fibres of his heart not merely vibrate, but they *pluck* them deeply. There are perpetual *showers*, showers of sunshine, showers of tenderness. Here the heart is too *green*, further on there is an *acid* character. Observe that it is not exactly a word here and there that

appears serious to me, for that could be easily removed, it is the vein itself, which proceeds from a profound modification in the poet's manner of seeing and feeling. I would like to specify it still better. I have already mentioned M. de Balzac; this original novelist has, as I have said, discovered a vein which is quite his own; he has laid no claims to producing something chaste or ideal; he prides himself above all on his physiology, he carries reality to extremes, and digs deep into it. What has M. de Lamartine done? He has ended, without perhaps being conscious of it, by producing a strange mixture, by adopting this foreign manner without at the same time giving up his own, by blending in a word the styles of Balzac and Bernardin.

The *Confidences* are, in fact, a romance. After the termination of the Graziella episode we must expect nothing more of them; they still offer pretty pages, but no consecutiveness, no connexion, and there is not enough truth in them to inspire confidence with regard to the facts or even the sentiments. The author remembers in them, but approximately; the portraits of his friends are forced and exaggerated. He imagines himself to have been, in those bygone times, much more liberal and much more like the man of the people that he is now, than he certainly was? The preoccupation with the present which he carries into the past, would form an interesting subject for a close study. That is the awkwardness of this kind of Memoirs which are not memories, and in which one poses. They contain in the main the events of your youth, but reviewed and recounted with your present feelings; or perhaps they are your sentiments at the time but disguised under the colours of the present. One knows not where is the true, where is the false; you do not know it yourself; this true and this false are unwittingly mixed up under your pen, and become confounded. Would the reader like quite a little example? A noble lady who receives M. de Lamartine when taking refuge in Switzerland during the Hundred Days, the Baronne de Vincy, is explaining to him that she does not see Mme. de Staël, that they are kept apart by politics, and she regrets not being able to introduce him at Coppet: 'She is a daughter of the Revolution by M. Necker, said Mme. de Vincy; we are of the religion of the past. We can no more *com-*

mune (*communier*) together than democracy and aristocracy'. *Commune* together! I ask the reader if any one thought of using this word before the humanitarian banquets. Mme. de Vincy said *communicate*. M. de Lamartine here commits an anachronism which is not merely an anachronism of language, but a moral anachronism. In the *Confidences*, he has perpetually committed similar ones.

I shall still have much to say when I write on *Raphaël*.

QUESTION OF THE THEATRES[1]

Monday, October 15, 1849.

A LAW dealing with the theatres is in course of elaboration at this moment. A project has been submitted to the Council of State and will be submitted to the Assembly. It is not my business to deal with the provisions of this bill nor to discuss them; but it is a matter that lends itself to many literary and moral observations, and I will try to touch upon a few of them.

Absolute doctrines in all things have reached their limits, and judicious minds are beginning to be enlightened by experience. Absolute liberty of the stage has its inconveniences and obvious dangers. This liberty can in no sense be compared with the absolute liberty of the press. A theatre presents both to the eye and the ear something living, something tangible and immediate; from this presentation there may ensue consequences of such a nature that the public authorities might have to interfere at any moment, just as they have a right to extinguish a fire. Besides, even in matters of the press, the Government, whilst granting the greatest possible liberty, reserves to itself an organ, a *Moniteur*. In the matter of the drama, should the Government, even whilst conceding every facility of competition, cease to have theatres under its protection, and consequently under its surveillance and direction?

There are three or four theatres which we cannot conceive without protection in France: the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique, the Théâtre-Français and the Italiens. These are *théâtres de luxe* or schools of taste. I say nothing of the Italian Opéra, an exotic plant, a rare and delicious

[1] *Of the Question of the Theatres and of the Théâtre-Français in particular.*

plant, which is every day being acclimatized among us, but still needs the artificial cultivation of the hot-house. The Grand-Opéra is a unique spectacle. Read again the *Mondain* and what Voltaire said about it; that is still true for us: the Opera represents Parisian civilization on its great days, in its pomps and its fêtes. After every social concussion, would you like to take the measure of the reviving confidence? would you know if the world is resuming its life, if society is again getting afloat and with full sails re-entering upon its elegancies and largesses? you must go, not to the Exchange, but rather to the orchestral stalls of the Opéra. When Paris begins to amuse itself again, it is not merely a privileged class that does so, but every class profits and prospers. Paris is then in a good way of saving itself, and France with it.

The Opéra-Comique represents that middle kind, dear to the French spirit, in which music and the drama mingle in a proportion that pleases our organization, and which one can enjoy without study and effort; it is a particularly agreeable kind, which blooms anew every season, and which it is natural to keep up. But the Théâtre-Français above all is and remains, through all vicissitudes, a great school of taste, of good language, a living monument in which tradition and novelty are reconciled. At a period when so many things have fallen to ruin around us, it would be unreasonable to endanger and leave to chance what has survived and subsists.

'Because I have committed a fault, that is no reason for committing them all', replied Mme. de Montespan to some one who expressed surprise at seeing her fast in Lent. Because we have committed many faults in politics, is no reason for adding to them; a government which, in lightness of heart, should give up what it can preserve by force and initiative with the assent of the public, would show less reason than Mme. de Montespan. In matters quite essential to the State, if an unforeseen accident causes a breakdown, if one of the rafters which supports the edifice tumbles to pieces, there comes a moment when the absolute need which is felt by all may cause it to be repaired; but in the delicate order, in what concerns intellectual interests, what has once fallen to ruins runs a great chance at the present time of remain-

ing a ruin, and, when society has such a hard struggle to supply the strictly necessary, the day of repair for the superfluous may be long in coming.

The superfluous, however, is *so necessary a thing*! the saying is Voltaire's, the Frenchman par excellence, who knew mankind so well. These words are seriously true in France, especially in Paris. One is never so conscious of the truth of it as after having been absent from Paris for a time. One finds elsewhere all sorts of useful and substantial qualities, of essential realities: the facility, the art of living is found in Paris alone. And that is why one feels so angry with those who do all they can to make Paris uninhabitable and wild: leave them for a moment to do their work; they are people who will bring down the level of human civilization in a few days, in a few hours. The like has been seen: in three weeks one may lose the result of several years, of several centuries almost. Civilization, life, take my word for it, is a thing that is learned and invented, perfected by the sweat and labour of many generations, and with the aid of a succession of men of genius, themselves followed and assisted by an infinite number of men of taste. Those men, those great artisans of civilization, but for whom the world would have remained a few centuries longer in the acorn stage, Virgil placed in the first rank, and rightly so, in his Elysium; he shows them by the side of heroic warriors, chaste pontiffs and religious poets—

Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.

After a few years of peace men too quickly forget this truth; they come to believe that culture is an inborn thing, that it is for man equivalent to nature. Have we still need of being warned? Savagery is always with us, at a few paces distance; and as soon as one relaxes one's efforts, it recommences. It is still true that, in good times, the art of living, as understood by the moderns, has nowhere else been cultivated as in Paris. Now, this perpetual and imperceptible art, this current of manners, is taught, is kept up or allowed to deteriorate, especially by the stage. The stage offers the quickest, the most direct and continuous means of action upon the masses. We live in a time when society imitates the stage much more than the latter imitates society. In the scandalous

and grotesque scenes which followed the February Revolution, what did we see as a rule ? A repetition in the street of what had been played on the boards. The public place parodied the stage in earnest ; the boulevard theatres were turned inside out, and one had the gallery in the open air. 'Look at my history of the Revolution passing by', said a historian, seeing one of these revolutionary parodies filing past his window. Another might have said with equal truth : 'There is my drama passing'. One thing among others which struck me in those so surprising events, and of which I do not pretend to diminish the importance, is the character of imitation, of literary imitation, which one may see through it all. One feels that words preceded deeds. Ordinarily literature and the drama laid hold of the great historical events in order to celebrate them, to give expression to them : here it is living history which has set itself to imitate literature. In a word, one feels that many events only came about because the people of Paris saw such and such a drama on the boulevards on a Sunday, or heard such and such a story read aloud to them in the workshops. Considering the disposition of such a people, for the Government to leave to chance the direction of the theatres, to reserve none to itself, not to use those great organs, those electric centres of influence on the public mind, not to assure a regular existence to three or four of them, in order that, with zeal and activity, by means of good plays, of new plays interspersed with traditionary ones, they might compete with the freer theatres and prevent anybody saying *Paris is fearfully bored*, or *Paris is fearfully amused*, would be to disregard the habits and exigencies of our nation, the moving spirit of the French mind itself.

Do not be mistaken : in spite of its divers and motley forms which succeed one another and often disguise the reality, this French spirit subsists ; it will subsist as long as there is a France, and it is to be hoped that that will be a long time yet. This spirit which one believed to be inherent in the old, pre-Revolution society has triumphed over all that successively modified and destroyed that society; it has triumphed over 1789, over 1793, over the Empire, the constitutional rule of the two Chambers. It is always being pronounced dead or at least very sick :

it lives, it reappears at every interval, the same essentially; it seeks with avidity to satisfy itself; and the important thing is to prevent it from turning to ill and becoming perverted. We French have for some time had all our faults; let us preserve at least some of our virtues. Where institutions favour and defray these qualities, and where they have not crumbled to pieces with the rest, let us carefully preserve them, and endeavour to repair rather than shatter them in the intervals of crises and on the morrow of storms.

A small number of old things have remained standing in France through our periodical, and more than periodical, revolutions; in this number is what we so rightly call the Comédie-Française. At the time of the first Revolution, that of 1789, the Comédie-Française had powerfully contributed its share towards it. Voltaire's tragedies had made pre-Revolution republicans even of those who had relished the *Mondain*; too late did they perceive the contradiction, too late to correct themselves. The *Mariage de Figaro* had inflamed men's minds and kindled a mad gaiety which was inextinguishable, but not inoffensive like the honest laughter of Molière's plays. The tragedy of *Charles IX* rang the tocsin. The Comédie-Française had made itself too conspicuous to remain inviolable and innocent; it suffered like the rest. Half of the actors put the other half into prison. At the end of the Reign of Terror there was constant division and schism; but, when at last the reunion came about, the Comédie-Française had never appeared more complete nor more brilliant than on the eve of Brumaire and in those years of the Consulate. It made up splendidly for its faults. No institution contributed more directly to the restoration of the public spirit and of taste. After 1814, the Comédie-Française was hardly eclipsed for a moment; during the whole of the Restoration we saw it shine with the brightest and purest brilliancy. Without desiring to be unjust to any of the dramatic poets of that day, one will perhaps grant that it possessed in Talma the foremost of these poets, the most naturally inventive, creating unexpected rôles in plays where but for him one would not have suspected their existence, creating also those other old rôles which people thought they knew, and into which he breathed life with a fresh inspiration.

After he was gone and Mlle. Mars with him, it was possible to say that the Comédie-Française fell off; and yet it endures, it has suddenly become young again with a young talent endowed with grace and spirit[1]; it has unexpected returns of favour and vogue with a public which hastens to it at the faintest signal, and which has the good sense to expect much of it. The French public, which holds so few things in respect, has kept up its religion for the Théâtre-Français; they believe in it; at every announcement of a new play, they attend hopefully. That is a thing which we are too fortunate in having to keep up merely. It is this theatre which it is especially necessary not to abandon, not to leave to the direction of a few and *en famille* (a bad direction, in my opinion, because it is too intimate, too convenient, and, as they say to-day, too fraternal), but to place under the effective management of some one responsible and interested in an active and courageous administration.

A talented writer, who understood the matter very well, M. Étienne, in his *Histoire du Théâtre-Français pendant la Révolution*, has said: 'Experience has shown that actors are only well governed by themselves: it is the only republic in the world where power is badly exercised by a chief'. The words are interesting. M. Étienne wrote that after the 18 Brumaire, under the Consulate. When there is a master at the Tuileries, shall I say it? this little republic of the Rue Richelieu presents few difficulties: an order from high quarters is soon given, and is always obeyed. But, in a real republic like ours, where there is simply a Ministry of the Interior, I should fear a relaxation. Let us not acquiesce, in matters of art, in the drawbacks of our Government. Minister, do not relax your hold.

I think I have remarked that, even in Letters, in this republic of Letters, the surest way, in order that things may hold together, is to have some one in the background, an individual or a small number, to hold the reins. I must explain myself, having long had ideas on that point which are not perhaps in agreement with those current to-day. Reflecting on what we call the great ages, what they were and why they were great, it has always appeared to me that, independently of the splendid men of genius

[1] Mademoiselle Rachel.

and talent without whom the material would have been wanting, we meet with some man who exercised a restraining and guiding influence, and rallied those talents around him. Otherwise, with the richest elements, there is a want of concerted action, and even the greatest men of genius are in danger of wasting their energies. The nations have been very conscious of this when saluting certain epochs with the names of Pericles, Augustus, Medici, Francis I, Elizabeth. In the seventeenth century in France we had Richelieu. After him, under Louis XIV, there was at first Colbert, a rather dull protector in the matter of belles-lettres, who was assisted by Chapelain; but soon we had Louis XIV, with his royal good sense, aided by Boileau. And all around, how many refined circles without which the test of a good work would not have been complete! There was the redoubtable test of Chantilly, where M. le Prince, the greatest of mockers, pardoned only what was excellent; the test of the court of Madame, where novelty was sure to find favour, on condition of satisfying an extreme delicacy; then the repeated tests of the circles of M. de La Rochefoucauld, of Mme. de La Fayette and so many others. Those are what we might call guarantees. Thus hemmed in and restrained by these vigilant eyes, talent attained to its full height. At this price are great literary ages formed and perfected. The life-giving breath of liberty, in a first moment of general inspiration and enthusiasm, suffices certainly to fertilize talents; but, when protracted, it exhausts itself and goes astray: enthusiasm, without points of support, without regular hearths where it is concentrated and fed, soon vanishes into air like a flame.

In the eighteenth century a great revolution took place in the manner of seeing and judging; the Court was readily dispensed with in intellectual matters. The reign of liberty was not yet come, it was the reign of *Opinion*, and one believed in it. But if we analyse the nature of Opinion in the eighteenth century, we shall see that it was compounded of the judgment of several regular, established circles, which gave the tone and laid down the law. This was the constituted aristocracy of intelligence; and this aristocracy was able, for a certain time, to exist in France, thanks to that absolute power

itself which it ordinarily censured and combatted. With the fall of the *ancien régime*, the regular circles which were dependent upon it whilst reacting against it, and which guided public opinion, broke up, and ever since they have been only incompletely reformed. There was entire liberty, but with its confused rumours, its contradictory judgments and all its uncertainties.

In our days the dispersion is complete; it was not yet so under the Restoration. At first some distinguished salons were re-opened, wrecks of the *ancien régime* or creations of the new. Their influence was real, their authority was felt. Never would the great talents who have since gone astray have permitted themselves such licences, if they had remained within sight of that world. One of the great errors of the last *régime* was to believe that literary opinion, the literary spirit, cannot be guided, and to let everything run hap-hazard in that quarter. The result was that the great talents, feeling nowhere the presence of elect judges, no longer retained by the circle of opinion, consulted only the changeable wind of a deceptive popularity. Emulation in them took a wrong direction, and, instead of aiming high, it has aimed low. To-day the dispersion, we say, the confusion has reached its last term. There is no power in high quarters that is qualified to guide; the distinguished circles are broken up for the time being and have disappeared. It would be vain to seek something like a reigning opinion in literary matters.

In a situation so apparently hopeless, I still believe that it would not be impossible, if polite society endures and calms down, to see re-established a certain order where the voice of opinion would gradually make itself heard. Only it would be necessary that governments of whatever kind, that the great literary bodies, the Academies themselves, should return to the idea that literature may up to a certain point be restrained and guided. Under all circumstances, a Théâtre-Français, well directed, would be a first circle, a focus around which might re-gather a habitual gallery and a few judges.

For my part, I have not so poor an idea of the public taken in the mass, on condition of its being sufficiently instructed. 'How many fools does it take to compose a public?' a man of ironical wit has said. I am con-

vinced that this man of wit was wrong, that he said a cutting and false thing. A public is never composed of fools, but of men of good sense, cautious, hesitating, scattered, who generally need to be rallied, to have their own opinions unravelled, and clearly explained to them. This is true of all publics, great and small, even those that are already a select few. To return to the particular point from which I have wandered, this is true even of dramatic committees. The small guiding senates obey a small number which leads them. In such a matter, the simplest course is again to return to a unit. It is a question of making a good choice. Once this good choice is made, things will arrange themselves. Have a good directing power at the Théâtre-Français, let it feel that responsibility rests upon it, that it has an interest in the theatre being alive and prosperous, in renewing itself as much as possible whilst keeping within the great lines of the master-works. We should be rather puzzled to give a precise definition of the Théâtre-Français with respect to what it should be henceforth. It has been sc often said that it is falling off; and we have seen it rise again suddenly in a quarter where we least expected it, and tradition reconciling itself with youth. Whilst a great actress gave new life and freshness to the master-works, light and poetic talents have introduced modern fantasy in its most vivid lustre. I should define the Théâtre-Français, if called upon, according to the rôle which appertains to it more than ever, as the contrary of what is gross, facile and vulgar; and, in the interval of the great works, I would very readily go to see, as upon a recent evening, *Louison*, or *Le Moineau de Lesbie*.

What is wanting more and more in France, indiscriminately called to the life of the orator's tribune and thrown entirely upon the public place, is a school of good language, of fine and lofty literature, a permanent and pure organ of tradition. Where could we find it more surely than in this theatre? We go there to see and hear what we have not the time to read. Public life encroaches upon us, hundreds of politicians arrive every year from the departments with more or less special qualities and excellent intentions I suppose, but with a language and accent more or less mixed. All these men, however, are by duty and taste vowed to speech and

eloquence. Where are they to improve themselves, and find recreation at the same time? Shall it be in seeing the graceful sketches, the charming bluettes of the little theatres, where wit too often turns to jargon? The salons properly speaking, the circles of the great world, have disappeared, or, if any should reopen, they would only re-echo all the evening the politics of the morning. But the Théâtre-Français is there. Government, keep it up more and more in the form of an institution; because you are yourself republican, do not conclude that it should be allowed to govern itself in the state of a republic. Estimate better the difficulties and differences. There at least should be only one master and one king, as Homer says, but a king whom you make responsible, and whom you will yourself watch over.

There was a thing formerly called a stage censorship, an ugly name, an odious name, which should in any case be suppressed. Does that mean that all surveillance should be suppressed? Is that fitting and even possible? Is it to the interest even of authors and theatres, which may at any moment (we have had examples of it) be carried away to compromising attempts which will have to be afterwards withdrawn, and which a little foresight might have avoided? The real surveillance of the stage, as I understand it, should be exercised in concert as it were with the respectable public, should have the public doing half its work. What goes on in the office of the Ministry of the Interior should be of so clear and open a nature, that at any moment, at the first demand, it might render a good account of itself to the public from the lofty tribune, amid the applause of respectable people. That is the kind of surveillance I mean, and which it appears impossible to me not to include in a law that is intended to be permanent. The spirit of authors would not suffer thereby, but would gain rather. The most exacting may set their minds at rest. A man of great wit, the Abbé Galiani, speaking of the freedom of the press, which Turgot in 1774 wished to establish by edict, wrote very seriously: 'Heaven preserve you from a liberty of the press established by edict! Nothing contributes more to rendering a nation coarse, to destroying taste, and debasing eloquence and every sort of intellect. Do you know my definition of the *oratorical sublime*?

It is the art of saying everything without being sent to the Bastille, in a country where it is forbidden to say anything. . . . The constraint of decency and the constraint of the press have been the causes of the perfection of wit, of taste, of expression among the French. Preserve both, else you are lost. . . . You will be as rude as the English without being so robust. . . .' It was easy for the Abbé Galiani to speak thus. The liberty of the press has not been granted, it has been conquered; it has not verified all the fears of the witty Abbé, but only some of them. It has found a corrective in the French esprit itself, which, whilst emancipating itself, has also imposed upon itself certain rules and certain difficulties in order to have the pleasure of setting them at nought. There is a press, and it is the only one that commands esteem, which imposes upon itself that reserve, from which the law, strictly speaking, frees it. This press gains thereby in esprit and colour. We are on the way perhaps, in too many articles of our manners, to becoming as rough as the English and Americans; but at times too, in the newspaper and the pamphlet, Voltaire would still recognize us. The surest course, however, where there is a profound and perceptible difference, as between the absolute liberty of the stage and that of the press, is not to abolish every guarantee, every control, and to be persuaded that French esprit, in the drama, would not be more ill at ease for feeling itself a little restrained.

It is not for me to draw conclusions here. My only conclusion would be that under one political form or another, the State in France has the same interests and the same duties; that it would err in abdicating all guidance of the mind of the public, in not making use of the legitimate organs of influence which are left to it; that it is good policy to endeavour in some way to restrain the growing coarseness, the immense grossness which from afar resembles a rising sea; to oppose to it what dams still remain undestroyed, and to actively encourage, in a word, all that has hitherto called itself taste, politeness, culture, civilization. Whatever the appearances to the contrary, and even after all shipwrecks, provided one does not perish in them, these names and things will always find an echo in France.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ[1]

Monday, October 28, 1849.

MME. DE SÉVIGNÉ, like La Fontaine, like Montaigne, is one of those subjects which are perpetually in the order of the day in France. She is not merely a classic, she is an acquaintance, and more than that, she is a neighbour and friend. All those who labour to make the reading of her letters, not more agreeable, but easier and more fluent, more illuminated in the smallest details, are sure of interesting us. M. Monmerqué rendered a service of this kind, about thirty years ago, by his excellent edition. M. Walckenaer, by his full and abundant biography which is in course of publication, and which the fourth volume, recently appeared, has not yet exhausted, fills up the measure. On Mme. de Sévigné and her world, her friends and acquaintance, and her friends' friends, thanks to the indefatigable researches of her curious biographer, we shall henceforth have all, and more than all, information.

M. Walckenaer is one of the most hard-working and many-sided of the savants of the day, an almost universal savant. Ask the naturalists: they will tell you that he has founded a branch of natural history; he began his literary career with a quite original work on the *Araneidae* or spiders; he has said the first and the last word on that subject; his writings in this branch of science are classics; he is the Latreille of Spiders. He has also studied bees. His *Géographie ancienne des Gaules* gives him a high rank among original geographers, in the following of d'Anville. And with all this we find him a lover of La Fontaine, following him in his

[1] *Memoirs concerning the Life and Writings of Mme. de Sévigné.* By M. le Baron Walckenaer (4 vols.).

reveries day by day, giving us a minute account of his doings, as Pellisson might have done, who was also celebrated for his spider; then, occupied with Horace, giving us two big volumes, certainly rather big, but full of things about the charming poet; and from him returning to La Bruyère, of whom he has published the best and most complete edition; lastly, applying himself to Mme. de Sévigné, as if he had never left her for an instant, and as if he had had no other task in life.

You know that good d'Hacqueville, the friend, the zealous confidant of Mme. de Sévigné and all her society, the man who multiplies himself and does his utmost to see and know everything, who knows everybody's cards, and is not the less obliging and indulgent on that account, incapable of neglecting a friend, absent or present, multiplying his pen and person to satisfy everybody. In vain did Mme. de Sévigné sometimes try to restrain his zeal in the matter of kind services and correspondence: 'You judge rightly, she wrote to her daughter, that since he does not like the discipline I had put upon him, I give a loose rein to all his kindnesses and leave him the freedom of his writing-desk. Imagine that he writes with that fury to everybody who is absent from Paris and every day sees those who remain: he is the *d'Hacquevilles*. . . .' That is the surname she gives him and she continues to speak of him as if he were several. Well! let us suppose for a moment that d'Hacqueville has returned to earth after nearly two centuries, that he sets himself to recall that time, to entertain us about Mme. de Sévigné and her friends, to try to tell us everything and forget nothing; imagine the familiar, abundant, interminable story that would make a story doubled and redoubled with numberless circuits and all sorts of parentheses —or, still better, imagine taking a stroll at Saint-Germain or Versailles when the Court of Louis XIV is in full swing, with d'Hacqueville for our master of the ceremonies and guide; he has Mme. de Sévigné on his arm, but he stops every moment, before every person he meets, for he knows all the masks, he accosts them one after another, he questions them for our better information; he always returns to Mme. de Sévigné, and she says to him: 'But, *les d'Hacqueville*, at this rate we shall never get on'. This is exactly the idea one may conceive of M. Walcke-

naer's work, full of interest and protraction, like the zigzag promenade we were imagining; it is a book that would make Mme. de Sévigné very grateful and a little impatient at the same time; she would say of her biographical d'Hacqueville as she said of the other, when she saw him make himself cheap for outsiders: 'He is indeed *a little comprehensive* in his attentions'. But gratitude would be uppermost, and it should with stronger reason be uppermost with us, who are not Mme. de Sévigné and whom this clever man, well informed as no other was, initiates into so many things which, but for him, we should never have had the chance of knowing. Add to that the odour of antique honesty which pervades these pages and manages to reconcile itself with the very heart of the *chronique scandaleuse* to which they are often devoted, a deep and naïve love of Letters and all the delicate pleasures they bring with them, a perfect bonhomie which is tenderly wedded to its whole subject and succeeds, after a little resistance on our part, to make us love and embrace it in all its hidden folds. All these qualities and merits, saving the slight displeasure which good taste obliged us to feel, make M. Walckenaer in our eyes the fullest, the most instructive and, if I may say so, the most obliging of biographers.

How does the person of Mme. de Sévigné come out of this study? She comes out of it as she appeared to us at first sight, and more like herself than ever. After study and reflexion we are confirmed in the idea of her which a first and unprejudiced impression had left upon us. And in the first place, the more one thinks of it the better one can understand her maternal love, that love which in her eyes represented all other kinds of love. This rich and strong nature indeed, this healthy and blooming nature, of which gaiety is rather the expression and seriousness the foundation, never had a passion properly so-called. Left an orphan at an early age, she never knew what filial affection was; she never speaks of her mother; once or twice she makes playful allusion to her father's memory; she had not known him. Conjugal love, which she loyally tried, was soon bitter to her, and she hardly had any opportunity of devoting herself to it. A young and handsome widow, with a free and intrepid spirit, in this rôle of a dazzling Célimène,

had she any secret inclination that she concealed? Did any spark fall upon her heart? Was she ever in danger of a moment of forgetfulness with her cousin Bussy, as M. Walckenaer, an attentive Argus, would incline us to believe? One never knows how to take these laughing and witty women, and we should be very much mistaken if we attached any importance to a few words which in others might mean a great deal. The fact is that she resisted Bussy, her most dangerous rock, and that, if she liked him a little, she did not love him with passion. This passion she brought to none until the day when these accumulated treasures of affection burst over the head of her daughter, never to be again displaced. An elegiac poet has remarked: a love which comes late is often most violent; one settles in one payment all the arrears of feelings and interests—

Saepe venit magno foenore tardus amor.

So it was with Mme. de Sévigné. Her daughter inherited all the savings of this so rich and feeling heart, which had said till that day: *I wait.* That is the true reply to those too clever and knowing people who have pretended to see in the affection of Mme. de Sévigné for her daughter an affectation and a mask. Mme. de Grignan was her mother's great, her only passion, and this maternal tenderness assumed all the marks indeed of passion, enthusiasm, prejudice, a slightly ridiculous air (if such a word may be applicable to such persons), a naïveté of indiscretion and a plenitude which make us smile. Let us not complain. All Mme. de Sévigné's correspondence is illumined as it were by this passion which is added to all the flashes, already so varied, of her imagination and her humour.

And on this latter point, that is to say temperament and humour, let us try to understand Mme. de Sévigné. In speaking of her we have to speak of charm itself, not a soft and languid charm, be it well understood, but a lively, overflowing charm, full of sense and salt, and anything but pale in colour. She has a vein of Molière in her. There is something of *Dorine* in Mme. de Sévigné, a Dorine of the great world and the best society; in other respects the same high spirits. A few words of Tallement des Réaux very well characterize

this charming and powerful feminine nature, as it showed itself in her youth and the plenitude of her life: after saying that he thinks her one of the most amiable and honest women in Paris, 'she sings, he adds, she dances, and has a very lively and pleasant wit; she is *brusque* and cannot refrain from saying what she considers neat, though often enough it is rather free (*gaillard*). . . .' That is the word we must not lose sight of in speaking of her, though one may conceal it under as much politeness and delicacy as one pleases. There was joyousness in her. She verified in her person the words of Ninon de l'Enclos: 'The joy of the spirit shows its strength'. She was of that race of minds to which Molière belonged, Ninon herself, Mme. Cornuel in a slight degree, La Fontaine; of a generation a little anterior to Racine and Boileau, and more vivacious, more vigorously reared. 'You appear born for pleasures, Mme. de La Fayette said to her, and they seem to have been made for you. Your presence heightens amusements, and amusements heighten your beauty when they are around you. In short, joyousness is the natural state of your soul, and chagrin is more contrary to you than to anybody'. She said herself, when recalling an old friend: 'I have seen M. de Larrei here, the son of our poor friend Lenet, with whom we laughed so often; for never was there so gay a set of young people as we were, in every way'. Her somewhat irregular but real beauty became radiant when she was animated; her face was lighted up by her mind, and it might be said that this mind was literally dazzling to the eyes. One of her male friends (the Abbé Arnauld), who was as little imaginative as it was possible to be, became so when he described her as follows: 'I can still see her as she appeared to me the first time I had the honour of setting eyes on her, arriving in her open carriage, right between Monsieur her son and Mademoiselle her daughter: all three such as the poets represent Latona between the young Apollo and the young Diana, *so much charm shone from the mother and children*!' There we have her true to life in her own setting and in her prime: beauty, wit and grace unconcealed, glowing in the full sunlight. We must note one shade however. Her gaiety, though so genuine, was not for every occasion, in or out of season, and no doubt

it became toned down in the course of years, though never quite extinguished. Speaking of a journey she made in 1672, in which she longed for the company of her amiable cousin de Coulanges: 'To be cheerful, she wrote, one must be with cheerful people. You know that I am what others wish me to be, but I do not originate'. That means that this charming spirit had every tone, and could accommodate itself to others. True it is that, even in the midst of sadness and vexations, she remained the finest feminine humour and the most cheerful imagination it was possible to see. She had a turn of expression quite her own, a gift of the most familiar and the most sudden images, in which she unexpectedly clothed her thoughts as no other woman could have done. Even when this thought is serious, when there is sensibility at the bottom of it, she finds words which baffle it and give the effect of gaiety. Her wit could never deny itself those vivacious flashes and gay colours. She is the very contrary of her good friends the Jansenists, who have a *dull* style.

Mme. de Sévigné, Mme. de La Fayette and Mme. de Maintenon are the most distinguished among the women of the seventeenth century who have written. The two latter succeeded in blending in a rare degree precision and atticism; but the first alone offers that continuous imagination, that invention of detail which enlivens all she touches, and which one enjoys in the same degree in La Fontaine and Montaigne. It is that vein of perpetual imagination in the details of the expression rather than in the whole, which above all charms us in France. It has been remarked, besides, that in this epoch of Louis XIV, all the women of society write with charm; to do that they have but to write as they talk and to draw from the excellent stream which surrounds them. This has often been asserted, but I can prove it at once by a piquant and entirely new example, which M. Walckenaer himself suggests to me. Among the persons he meets in his path, in his fourth volume, is a certain Marquise de Courcelles who had an unpleasant celebrity, and whom Mme. de Sévigné mentions in her letters. M. Walckenaer has devoted quite a chapter to this romantic beauty; but he has endeavoured to translate her, and does not allow her to speak for herself as much as he

might have done. Mme. de Courcelles wrote however with a singular ingenuousness she related a part of her adventures in a confession addressed to one of her lovers, letters written to this same lover are still in existence. From a moral point of view she is the least like Mme. de Sévigné, but she may be compared to her without any prejudice in respect of wit and charm.

The Marquise de Courcelles, née Sidonia de Lenoncourt, of an illustrious family of Lorraine, left an orphan at an early age, was brought up in a convent in Orleans of which her aunt was Abbess, and removed from thence before she was fourteen years of age, by the order of Louis XIV, to be married as a rich heiress to Maulevrier, one of Colbert's brothers. The marriage was foiled by the cleverness of this young girl, who, hardly out of her childhood, showed a power of cunning and intrigue which would have done honour to a heroine of the Fronde. She thought she could make a better bargain by marrying the Marquis de Courcelles, who enjoyed no advantage except that of being a nephew of the Maréchal de Villeroy, and who above all offered to pledge himself, in the marriage contract, never to take her into the country (a capital clause), never to make her leave the Court. That was the only stage which the young woman judged worthy of her triumphs. She had only to show herself there in order to succeed. On the night itself of the marriage, which had been celebrated with great pomp, the Queen having done the bride the honour *de lui donner la chemise* (style of the time), all these people had no sooner retired, when Sidonia comprehended from the very first words that in M. de Courcelles she had to do with a coarse and contemptible man, and she despised him. She had the strength of mind to hide her feelings for a week, in consideration of her outfit and the presents which had been given to her; after that she could contain herself no longer: 'I thought, she said, that my reputation demanded that I should not appear infatuated with a man whom nobody esteemed, and I gave such free expression to my aversion for him, that in a month all France was informed of it. I did not then know that to hate one's husband and to be able to love another, is almost one and the same thing. Many people took care to disabuse me of this error'. One may easily

imagine that, being in this disposition of mind, there was no lack of bold and indiscreet aspirants to her favours; one will understand it better still when one knows from herself how beautiful she was; and it does not appear that she exaggerated in any particular. I may be permitted to quote this entire page, one of the most charming ever penned by a woman seated before her looking-glass. It is another portrait to be added to those of the gallery of Versailles, or, if you prefer it, it is like an enamel of Petitot.

'As for my portrait, she wrote to a man who loved her, I would like to paint it according to the idea you have formed of it, and to have people refer to your description; but I must tell you simply what I am like. I will confess that, without being a great beauty, I am one of the most amiable creatures that one may set eyes on; that there is nothing in my face and manners but pleases and touches; that everything in me, even the sound of my voice, inspires love, and that people in society of the most opposite inclinations and dispositions are of one mind on that point, and agree that one cannot see me without liking me.

'I am tall, I have an admirable figure and the best air it is possible to have. I have beautiful brown hair dressed in the best style to adorn my face and set off the prettiest complexion in the world, though marked in many places by small-pox. I have rather large eyes; they are neither blue nor brown, but of an agreeable and particular colour between the two; I never open them wide, and although there is no affectation in this manner of keeping them slightly closed, it is yet true that this is a charm which makes my glance the softest and tenderest in the world. My nose is of a perfect regularity. My mouth is not of the smallest, nor is it very large.

'Some censorious critics have declared that, according to the correct proportions of beauty, my lower lip might be considered a little too projecting. But I believe that this is imputed to me as a defect, because they were unable to find any others, and that I must pardon those who say my mouth is not quite regular, when they admit at the same time that this defect has an infinite charm and gives me a very spirituel air when I laugh and when my face is animated. In short, I have a well-cut mouth, admirable lips, pearl-coloured teeth, handsome forehead, cheeks and facial contour, a well-moulded bust, divine hands, passable arms, that is to say a little thin; but I find compensation for this misfortune in the pleasure of possessing the shapeliest legs in the world. I sing well, without much method; I am even musical enough to pass muster with the connoisseurs. But the great charm of my voice lies in its sweetness, and the

tenderness it inspires ; I have, in short, weapons of every kind to please, and have never used them hitherto without success.

'As for esprit, I have more than anybody ; it is natural, amusing, playful, capable too of great things, if I tried to make an effort. I have lights and know better than anybody what I ought to do, though I hardly ever do it '.

Before such a portrait one may imagine quite a destiny of pleasure, folly and misfortune. The young Sidonia was born a little too late or a little too soon. She should have been born in time to take part in the Fronde ; she would have taken her regular place there after Mme. de Chevreuse, Mme. de Longueville and the Palatine, beside Mmes. de Montbazon, de Châtillon and de Lesdiguières. She should have come into the world a little later and been simply Manon Lescaut.

Destiny played her a trick in casting her into the beginning of the great epoch of Louis XIV, that reign in which so many gallant things were permitted, but where it was necessary to observe a certain regularity even in disorderly conduct. She began at the outset with the most risky intrigue. By rejecting Maulevrier she fell out with the Colbert family ; she aroused the admiration of Colbert's great rival Louvois. This minister, then thirty-six years of age, saw her at the Arsenal, where M. de Courcelles had a post in the artillery, and where she resided. To see her and love her was for Louvois one and the same thing. He had come one morning to the Arsenal to see some guns ; she was coming out to attend mass at the Célestins. 'He recognized me, she says, by my livery, he alighted and accompanied me to mass, and heard it with me. Although I had no experience of the signs of a nascent passion, I did not fail to comprehend that this step on the part of a man so brusque and so burdened with affairs, meant something for me '. Misfortune would have it that she immediately took almost as great a dislike for Louvois as she had for her husband, and that she took it into her head to lure him on. To be on bad terms with the Colberts, and to try to play a cunning game with Louvois, was to prepare a dangerous future. But the imprudent young person was fifteen years of age and only followed her whims.

Two things were prejudicial to Louvois in her mind, without counting her dislike of him: the first was, that all her family and even her husband shamefully conspired to make him her lover, in order to advance their fortunes. The second reason was that she already loved a cousin of her husband, the amiable and seductive Marquis de Villeroy. But I see that if I do not take care, I shall involve myself in the telling of a romance, and that will not suit my purpose here. I had in view only to prove that these women of the seventeenth century only require the will to write with an infinite charm, that they all have the gift of expression, and that Mme. de Sévigné is only the first in a numerous *élite*. With regard to the Marquise de Courcelles, one should read her adventures in M. Walckenaer's story, or better still in her own. Her indiscretions ruined her: she alienated Louvois; Villeroy escaped her; banished to the provinces by her husband, she there yielded to a vulgar seduction, and saw herself convicted. The considerations which her husband still showed her continued as long as she had any fortune, and, as soon as he had sufficient proof to deprive her of it, he threw off all disguise. The Marquise de Courcelles then commenced a life of imprisonments in the Conciergerie and litigations, from which she never again emerged. Having found a refuge in Geneva, she was able for a time, by her grace and charming hypocrisy, to beguile nobles, bourgeois and syndics, even the most austere Calvinists. She then found a devoted and faithful friend in a gentleman named Du Boulay, a captain in the regiment of Orleans, who became her Chevalier des Grieux. But not even him was she able to keep, and she pursued the course of her inconstancies. It was Du Boulay who had the idea of collecting Mme. de Courcelles' letters and papers, in order to have them read in confidence to his friends: 'I had to justify myself, says this gallant man, for having too faithfully and too strongly loved the most charming creature in the universe, indeed, but the most faithless and most frivolous, and whom I discovered to be such. I had too little confidence in my eloquence alone to justify me, and the attempts I made every day to describe the charms of her mind (and that was the strongest part of my defence) satisfied me so little myself, that I was well aware that they would con-

vince nobody. In this strait, which I could not get out of, it happily occurred to me one day that I possessed sure means of persuasion ; that the letters she had written to me were so beautiful and so perfect that I need only show them to convince people better than anything that I could say'. So it happens that these letters and memoirs have been preserved. They were found in manuscript at Dijon by Chardon de La Rochette, among the papers of Président Bouhier, and printed in 1808. Faithless to Du Boulay as she had been to all, and after several final scandals, Mme. de Courcelles, left a widow, ended by contracting what is called a foolish marriage. She died in 1685, only thirty-four years of age.

A comparison naturally suggests itself between her and the Duchesse de Mazarin, that niece of the Cardinal with whom she had been very intimate, who was for a time her companion in confinement, and afterwards her rival, and who is so well known herself for her conjugal adventures, her law-suits, her flight and gallant peregrinations. Between these two women (two devils in angels' shape) one might draw a close parallel which would be curious for the history of the manners of the grand century. But on one important point I would like the reader to note the conclusion to the advantage of the Duchesse de Mazarin. The latter, indeed, in spite of everything that could bring her low, was always able to maintain her rank and to conciliate what we must call (I know no other word) consideration. She owed it no doubt in part to the memory of her uncle, to her wealth, to her grand connexions, but also to her character, and her attitude : 'Mme. de Mazarin is no sooner arrived in any place, says Saint-Évremond, when she sets up a house, and all the other houses are forsaken for hers. One finds there the greatest possible freedom ; one lives there with a like discretion. Everybody moves there more comfortably than at home, and more respectfully than at Court'. That was the principal merit, the art of living and reigning which immortalized Hortense and saved her renown. She had, after all, balance and economy even in wasting her qualities and her gifts ; she was not content with the possession of wit, she loved it in others ; she sought the light of knowledge, then a new thing, and was always able to surround herself with a

circle of distinguished men; in short she lived and died a great lady, whilst the poor Sidonia, with all her wit and grace, ended as an adventuress. Once again, her name is ready found: she was the Manon Lescaut of the seventeenth century.

Some day, when there is a *librairie de luxe*, this little volume of Mme. de Courcelles ought to be reprinted.[1]

[1] The *Memoirs and Correspondence of the Marquise de Courcelles* have been since reprinted and published by M. Paul Pougin, in Jannet's Bibliothèque Elzévirienne, 1855.

M. DE LAMARTINE[1]

Monday, October 29, 1849.

UNDER this title of *Raphaël*, M. de Lamartine has detached from his *Confidences* the most momentous event of his youth, that great event of the heart which one has only once, and which, in the sphere of sensibility and passion, dominates a whole lifetime. The *Graziella* episode, in spite of the importance and the interest which the talent of the author has succeeded in imparting to it, savours of composition and art. The charming coral-fisher's daughter of Naples is in part a creation. After all, take away the Italian sky and the costume of Procida, and it is merely a grisette adventure, embellished and idealized by the artist, raised after the event to the proportions of beauty, but one of those adventures which leave too few traces in life, and which are afterwards rediscovered in the far-distant memory, when the poet or painter feels the need of ransacking it for the subject of an elegy or a picture. It is otherwise with the woman who was sung under the name of Elvire. Here we have quite a destiny and almost a religion. We can understand the author's desire to treat separately this unique souvenir, and not to confound it with the bulk of his reminiscences.

A simple and precise account, detailed and faithful, of that mysterious passion, which the poet of the *Méditations* only half celebrated by disguising it, and which seems to have given the secret impetus to his genius, would be infinitely precious as a study, and would assuredly form interesting reading. Would the memory of Elvire gain by it? Would this vague figure, of which we only obtained a glimpse by the light of the stars, by becoming

[1] *Raphaël. Pages of the Twentieth Year.* By M. de Lamartine.

more distinct, remain as elevated and as pure? When a universal emotion has been produced around an ideal being, would it not be better not to bring the object of it too near, but to trust to the reverie and imagination of all to supply the details, and to finish the picture better than we could have done? I believe so, and yet, as regards the real Elvire, a faithful and simple narrative embodying all the poet's memories, would be, I repeat, very precious and might besides have a great charm.

Here, in *Raphaël*, we see at once that it is not such an account that the author intends to give us, and that we must wait. Fearing a direct and quite bare revelation at a date still so near, he has used some slight precaution and disguise to hide his indiscretion. It is not himself but a friend (the best and handsomest of his friends, it is true), Raphaël, who has left a manuscript at his death. The veil, one may say, is thin; yet there is a veil. The title of the story is: *Pages de la vingtième année*. The man who, after 1816, loved the woman celebrated under the name of Elvire, was as a matter of fact at least twenty-five years of age; he was nearer thirty than twenty. I only pick out these first details in order to show that we cannot expect, in this prose story, to find the whole truth and reality on the subject which, if simply narrated, would interest us so much. There will necessarily still be a portion of romance mingled with real and living sentiments. We cannot be surprised then if, on reading these pages, we find, side by side with charming touches and thoughts calculated to move, many others which are artificial; we cannot be surprised if we do not divine the whole man. In the *Méditations* we had pure poetry: shall we have here living reality? No; we shall have a semi-reality, poetry still, but poetry of the second vein, poetry put into romance.

I feel how much I ought to ask pardon of many of our young readers, and especially of our lady readers, for my temerity.[1] These pages of *Raphaël* contain, indeed, more pretty things than it takes to beguile, at a first reading, minds and hearts which are quick to admire, and which only

[1] And also of my friend, M. Arsène Houssaye, who has made hfmself their interpreter in the *Constitutionnel*, at the first moment of the publication of *Raphaël*. The graceful poet of the roses and of youth must pardon me for being less young and less lenient than himself.

seek an excuse to be charmed. *Raphaël* is a book of love containing prodigious faults, but also rare qualities, written by the richest, the most abundant and most flexible pen of the present day. The faults which pervade it, and often overflow, are precisely the faults of our time, that is to say those which ordinary readers are least sensible of, so that some will perhaps go so far as to be sensible of them inversely, and regard them as beauties. In any case, when one is young, though as distinguished as can be, one quickly glides over these faults at a first reading; one sees only that which pleases, that which offers the most modern idealized expression of our sentiments, of our situation and our desire. These pages, which have not yet served any preceding generation, and which seem to have been written expressly for us every morning, immediately become our own as it were and familiar. They flatter us by touching more than one secret fibre. They occupy our last thoughts at night and our first dreams in the morning, we talk them over first thing on meeting a friend, we recommend them each to the other to read, and lightly mark passages in the volume which another will presently devour. This sort of book that a generation welcomes at its birth, that can be read in company with another, and with which, so to say, one loves, is very delicate to analyse; the critic, when he comes and points out the things that are offensive or discordant, appears to intrude more or less upon private and dear sentiments, and to play the part of a mar-joy. M. de Lamartine knows it well, and I long ago heard that he had uttered these words: 'No matter! let them say what they please: I have the women and the young men on my side'. A charming and very desirable audience, no doubt, but not definitive; for even young men cease to be young, and some day, when they chance to read again, they are astonished. Then other generations quickly follow after, who are not taken in by the same faults, who wish for different ones, who wish above all to see their sentiments clothed in new costumes and fashions. Then the fallen book is judged only by the criterion of its talent and merit. Of that severe morrow every serious artist ought to think. M. de Lamartine, it is true, may have thought, in the intoxication of his success, that such a morrow would never come

for him. It is thirty years since, by the publication of his *Méditations*, he aroused the enthusiasm of the *élite* of the younger generation of the day. Thirty years after, with this same Elvire changed into Julie, he may believe that he will once more] carry away the youth of to-day. He would be much mistaken, we are certain, if he thought that; the attraction is not the same by a long way, nor is it unmixed. However, it is not yet exhausted, and there is in the destiny of this poet, who has charmed both fathers and sons with the same theme of love, something that really recalls the destiny of Ninon de l'Enclos. In any case, sooner or later, the fatal morrow will come. For myself, who as a critic belong more to that morrow than I would desire, after reading *Raphaēl*, I ask myself, not whether it contains here and there sufficient beauties to touch us and to delight the young greedy and all-devouring hearts; but I ask myself whether the minds which have become with age fastidious and difficult, those that possess the sense of perfection, or who merely want to see nature in the ideal, are not arrested at every moment and more often find their taste offended than their heart rejoiced and really moved by this reading.

I will merely hasten over the preface in which Raphaël, that best friend of the author, is presented and described to us in the smallest details of his beauty, with more coquetry and care, but with less charm, I think, than we saw the other day in the pretty Mme. de Courcelles seated before her looking-glass. I can think of nothing less interesting than a man admiring himself in a mirror and playing the Adonis. Raphaël unites all the perfections, both physical and moral, all the gifts of the angel, his patron, and of the great painter, his name-sake. I pass over the physical description; and, on this point, I will permit myself only one remark. The author, in attempting to apply to his hero the type of beauty of the great painter of Urbino, forgot one thing; that is, that the first, sovereign impression made upon us by a portrait of Raphaël, is one of virgin purity and chastity. Now, I fail to receive this impression when the author, translating into words the portrait of the painter, exhausts himself in describing those eyes 'which are, he says, *imbued* with light to the very depth, but rather *humid* from the rays *diluted* in dew or in tears'. There I divine

a voluptuous intention, which I can see in no face painted by Raphaël, not even his own. It may be that the voluptuous entered into Raphaël's life, but M. de Lamartine has gratuitously attributed it to his brush. I return to the Raphaël of to-day, to M. de Lamartine's Raphaël: 'If he had held a brush, says our author, he would have painted the Madonna of Foligno; if he had handled the chisel, he would have modelled the Psyche of Canova; if he had known the language in which sounds are written, he would have noted the aërial plaints of the sea-breeze in the fibres of the Italian pines. . . . If he had been a poet, he would have written Job's apostrophe to Jehovah, the stanzas of Hermina in Tasso, the conversation of Romeo and Juliet in the moonlight, of Shakespeare, the portrait of Haydee of Lord Byron. . . . If he had lived in those ancient republics when man developed entirely in freedom, as the body develops without bandages in the open air and sunshine, he would have aspired to every summit like Julius Cæsar, he would have spoken like Demosthenes, he would have died like Cato'. Cato, Cæsar, Demosthenes, Tasso, Shakespeare, Job and *tutti quanti*, all these in a single man, *à la bonne heure!* When once one has gone out of one's way to indulge in ideals, the simplest thing is not to stop half-way in one's ambitious desires. But, after this description of Raphaël, M. de Lamartine can only have one reply to those who should ask him if Raphaël is not himself; he will have to reply as did Rousseau to those who asked him if he intended to paint himself in Saint-Preux: 'No, he said, Saint-Preux is not what I have been, but what I would like to have been'.

The romance begins with a description of the places, the lakes and the mountains which will form the scenery, as it were, of this love: 'One cannot rightly understand a feeling except in the places where it was conceived. . . . Take away the cliffs of Brittany from René, the savannahs of the desert from Atala, the Swabian mists from Werther, the billows *imbued* with sunlight and the mountains *sweating with heat* from Paul and Virginia, and you will understand neither Chateaubriand, nor Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, nor Goethe'. All this is correct, saving however those mountains *sweating* with heat which are a picturesque invention and which jar unpleasantly with

the calm and reposeful idea of *Paul and Virginia*, as the too voluptuous interpretation of M. de Lamartine just quoted jarred with the pure idea of a face of Raphaël. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is the Raphaël of the Indian isles; he is celestial with his brush and chaste like the other painter of divine infancy. M. de Lamartine feels both of them deeply; how comes it that he derogates so lightly, and with apparent unconsciousness, from the chief impression which both of them leave on the soul? It is difficult to explain such lapses from taste.

The frame formed by the lake and the mountains would be well placed, if it did not soon become too large and projecting for the characters. The descriptive poet indiscreetly intrudes, with his artifices and his tricks of the brush, into the very much more personal and selfish feelings of an awakening love. Happy lovers are ready to put up with any kind of frame; they have in themselves the power of beautifying a desert. A luxuriant nature no doubt serves them better and enchants them; the grandeur of nature admired with another is the finest accompaniment of a noble love. But it is not right for the poet to insist upon it more than the lovers would be likely to do themselves. Thus, when after a storm scene, in which he has rescued and long watched over the fainting Julie, Raphaël describes, in the morning, the Abbey of Haute-Combe, with its *architecture alive with brambles, floating ivy, pendant gilliflowers, climbing plants, with its luxuriance of sunlight, perfumes, murmurs of sacred psalmodies of the winds, the waters, the birds, the resounding echoes* . . ., when he exclaims: 'Nature is the high priest, the great scene-painter, the great sacred poet and the great musician of God'; he feels obliged almost immediately to inform us that he only thought of all that since: 'I was not, at that moment, sufficiently master of my thoughts, he says, to put these vague reflexions into words'. Why then put them into words for us, with this double display of metaphysics and colours? Show us the abbey with two broad touches, and pass on as you did at the time. For, after all, what are you in love with? with your mistress, or with nature? Which of the two is for you in the foreground? One must choose, and in *Raphaël* the writer no longer chooses: he tries to confound and identify the two; that is his

dream. There was a time when he did choose. In that admirable elegy, *Le Lac*, which is better, in my opinion, than the whole of *Raphaël*, the poet as yet only takes the objects for what they are, a little indistinctly, in his eyes, for the confused witnesses, for the confidants and the depositaries of his happiness—

> O lac, rochers muets, grottes, forêt obscure,
> Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir,
> Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle Nature,
>   Au moins le souvenir !

Read the poem again, or rather repeat it for a moment from memory, and ask yourself if this simple cry, this vague and profound appeal does not better render the sincerity of the sentiment than to say : 'Thus we visited together in succession all the *creeks*, all the *billows*, all the *sands* of the lake, all the *peaks*, all the *brows*, all the *gorges*, all the secret *valleys*, all the *caves*, all the *cascades* encased in the fissures of the rocks of Savoy'. Addressing the cherished lake which he revisited alone after a year the poet exclaimed with emotion—

> Tu mugissais ainsi sous ces roches profondes,
> Ainsi tu te brisais sur leurs flancs déchirés ;
> Ainsi le vent jetait l'écume de tes ondes
>   Sur ses pieds adorés !

Was not the sentiment better observed in this simple foam cast up at random, than when we read to-day : 'A terrace covered with a few mulberry-trees separates the château from the beach of fine sand whither come continually to *die*, to *foam*, to *lick* and to *babble the little blue tongues of the waves*'. Remark, even in the best passages, that what is here given us as the last word, is neither more true nor more real : it is less contained, and hence less poetical. For poetry is the essence of things, and we must take good care not to drown the drop of essence in a mass of water or in floods of colour. Poetry consists not in saying everything, but in leaving everything to be imagined.

Has the person of Elvire transformed into that of Julie become more living ? Yes, in part ; there are moments when we think we can see and hear this charming and delicate creature. But at other moments and in

other parts, the character has become in part systematized. We may be sure that the real Elvire did not entirely answer to the description of this new Julie. And since the poet has gone so far as to change her name, I will confess that I do not much like this name Julie. It recalls the name of Jean-Jacques' heroine, but it also recalls a line of Voltaire—

Chez Camargo, chez Gaussin, chez Julie.

It recalls to my mind a line of André Chénier—

Et nous aurons Julie au rire étin celant. . . .

There are moral shades attached to a name. Julie would rather seem to be a name brimming with pleasure; it is a Roman woman's name, or at least a name suitable to a robust woman. The Julie of *Raphaël* is a frail creature, delicate, nervous, quite an exceptional nature. Raphaël at first only heard her voice: 'It resounded, he says, between half-closed teeth, like those little metal harps which the children of the Isles of the Archipelago play on their lips, in the evening, by the seashore. It was a ringing rather than a voice. I had observed it without thinking that it would *ring so deep* for ever in my life'. In the first connected conversation she has with Raphaël, Julie very frankly explains to him her situation and tells her story. She is a creole of San Domingo; an orphan, brought up with the daughters of the Legion of Honour, married at seventeen with her full consent to an old man, an illustrious savant, who is not and does not wish to be more than a father to her (she insists very distinctly on this point), Julie is affected by a strange malady which consumes her, and forbids her, even at the price of a weakness, either giving or receiving happiness. This young woman has imbibed from her education and in the society of her husband the pure doctrines of the eighteenth century; she is an unbeliever, a materialist, nay an atheist; this does not prevent her from being very intimate with M. de Bonald, and it was to please her that one day the poet of the *Méditations*, he says, innocently, and without exactly knowing what he was doing, perpetrated the ode to *Genius*, dedicated to the great adversary of Liberty.

This little apology, insinuated *en passant*, must appear a happy idea on the part of the future tribune. With a husband who is no more than a father to her, and who, in his indulgent philosophy, would permit her much, with the positive opinions and doctrines she has formed for herself, one is forced to acknowledge that Julie can be protected in her long *tête-à-têtes* with her young friend (and she admits it) only by her malady and the singularity of her nature. When our thought is obliged to dwell on particular circumstances so disagreeable, we are justified in our astonishment at suddenly hearing this materialistic woman railing against the *abject nature of the sensations*, and appealing to a *supernatural purity*: '. . . You would find what you call a happiness, she says to her lover; but this happiness would be an error for you! And for me. . . I should sink from the height on which you have placed me! . . .' The unbelieving Julie is wrong in seeking reasons where she can find none; in these moments she speaks as a Platonist might have done.

Let us go to the root of our criticism and evolve our thought: the author of *Raphaël*, in this delicate part of his story, intended to tell us all, and has not dared. He has tried to make a full confession, and has stopped halfway, remembering that it was at the same time another's confession. He has tried to reconcile what he thought due to the memory of Elvire, with what he owed to the present interest of the romance. To this end, he has invented obstacles, impossibilities, to render probable what is not so, impossibilities which themselves become enormous improbabilities. After that, can we be surprised when we catch him contradicting himself in places? The world has spoken much ill of Rousseau and his *Confessions*, whilst at the same time enjoying them. When a man decides to write his Confessions, there is, in my opinion, no room for compromise: he must make them true and faithful, he must suppress as little as possible, he must invent nothing, and above all never sophisticate them. Now, one feels every moment in *Raphaël* the deterioration, the subtle and sophisticated exaggeration of what must have existed in the state of a simpler passion; one feels the *fiction* stealing in. It is especially in the conversations of the two lovers on the lake, in the interminable dissertations on God or infinity, that I

think I feel the invasion of what I call fable and system. Here the moral anachronism becomes evident. Never did any young woman, about the time of 1817 or 1818, though she were on a philosophical level with Mme. de Condorcet herself, talk in that way; it is the pantheism (the word was not invented then), the pantheism, we say, of some free-thinking and witty woman of 1848, that the author of *Raphaël* must have subsequently put into the mouth of the poor Elvire, who is unable to raise any objections. Never could Elvire have said, pointing to the setting sun: 'Do you see the disk half sunk behind those *firs which are like the eyelashes of the sky*?' And, however amorous, however intoxicated her lover may have been, he did not express himself then as he does now: 'I opened my arms to the air, to the lake, to the light, as if desiring to embrace Nature and thank her for having become *incarnate* and alive for me in a being who united, in my eyes, all her mysteries, all her goodness, all her life, all her intoxication! . . . I had ceased to be a man, I was a *living, crying, singing, praying, invoking, thanking, adoring, overflowing hymn*, etc., etc.'. I cut short the litany. And again: 'There was in our souls enough life and love to animate all this nature, *waters, earth, sky, rocks, trees, cedar and hyssop*, to make them render *sighs, ardours, embraces, voices, cries, perfumes, flames*, etc., etc.'. And further on, speaking of Julie, after exhausting, it seems, all passionate terms: 'I thought of names for her, he says, I found none. For want of a name, I called her to myself *mystery*; under this name I paid her a worship which was of the earth by its tenderness, which partook of ecstasy by its enthusiasm, of reality by its presence, and of heaven by its adoration'. With the help of these grand frenzied words he would like to simulate the enthusiasm he ceases to have, and succeeds in deceiving for a moment only a few open and easy souls who still believe in all words.

I will not dwell upon the great scenes of the romance, not even on that of the *suicide*, which is magnificently framed, as always, but which, as it is told, misses its effect, and besides ends rather absurdly. I will confine my attention to the person of Julie alone, who is the soul of the book, and will apply to her what M. de Lamartine himself, in one of the fine passages of the volume,

says of Mme. de Warens, on the occasion of his visit to Les Charmettes : 'I defy any reasonable man, he declares, to recompose with any probability the character which Rousseau attributes to his friend, out of the contradictory elements which he unites in this feminine nature. One of these elements excludes the other'. I will say, then, reasoning exactly like M. de Lamartine, and opposing the contradictory elements of which Raphaël's mistress is composed: If Julie is an unbeliever, she should not speak of God every moment. If she is a materialist, she should not show so much contempt for matter and the sensations. If she has espoused the teachings of the school of Cabanis, she cannot have so much admiration for M. de Bonald. If, at a certain moment, she is converted to God, it should be to the God of the Christians, to the God of the crucifix, to the only God that her lover then confessed. She should not, in any case, express herself as none dreamed of expressing themselves at that date. She could not be guilty of the kind of *galimatias double* (as you will judge) which Raphaël puts into her mouth in this solemn moment of conversion. '*Dieu! Dieu! Dieu!*' she exclaimed again, as if trying to teach herself a new language; '*Dieu, c'est vous! Dieu, c'est moi pour vous! Dieu, c'est nous! Raphaël, me comprenez-vous? Non, vous ne serez plus Raphaël, vous êtes mon culte de Dieu!*' I conclude that the real Elvire would have a difficulty in recognizing herself in the super-refined pages of M. de Lamartine's pantheistic novel, and I restore her in my imagination to her original, very different shape, as she first appeared on the shores of the lake to the young poet, himself so different!

Among these false and factitious elements which I think I have sufficiently pointed out, we might remark (and we should not forget it), in almost every chapter or couplet, of which the story is composed, some true accents, some happy and delicate touches, an inexplicable and puzzling blend more calculated to sadden the already mature reader than to console him. In a last farewell pilgrimage, which, before quitting their abode of happiness the two lovers make to all the favourite spots, pointing out to her friend the fisherman's hut in which they met for the first time, and which is just visible on the horizon, Julie says with feeling: 'That is the place!

Will there ever be a place and a day, she added sadly, when the memory of what has passed within us, there, in immortal hours, will appear to you, in your distant future, no bigger than that little spot on the dim outline of the coast?' A true accent, a natural speech, and full of feeling, such as I would like to have heard all through! But could we not reply to her: There will be something sadder for you, for the memory of these immortal hours, than to be dismissed to the distant past like a just visible point: namely, to be taken up some day, to be exhibited and exposed to all eyes as a mere excuse for fresh reveries, as a groundwork for new embroideries and thoughts.

Three passages especially in the volume made a favourable impression upon me, and they have no connexion with the romance: firstly, the visit to Les Charmettes, when M. de Lamartine speaks of Rousseau with eloquence and truth. Then that other visit which the young poet pays, with his manuscript of the *Méditations* in his hand, to the printer Didot: the face of the estimable classical publisher, his refusal, his reasons, all is described with spirit and archness; the poet has taken a charming revenge. Lastly, the most touching passage is certainly the story of the cluster of trees cut down on the Milly estate; here we find again, but too late, the true and vibrating chord he should never have quitted. An occasional happy note of it was, however, found again in the souvenirs of the Pont des Arts and the Quai Conti. As to the great final scenes of the tree of Saint-Cloud, otherwise called the *Tree of the Adoration*, and the promenades in the park of Mousseaux, I am little touched by them; they fall into that new system of love, which consists in identifying Julie with nature and God, in making of all three a mixture which appears to have something to do with the author's present religion, and is part perhaps of the future religion of the world. I am not yet so advanced as that. To confine myself to literature, in all these pages and in a hundred others, the author makes an unmeasured abuse of harmonies, rustic images, verdure, murmurings and waters. An eminent critic, M. Joubert, speaking of these same defects, much less marked, but already perceptible in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, said: 'In Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's style there is a prism which

fatigues the eyes. After reading him for a time, one is delighted to see that the verdure and the trees in the country have not so much colour as they have in his writings. His harmonies make us love the discords which he banished from the earth, and which we find at every step. Nature has indeed its music, but fortunately it is rare. If in real life we heard the melodies which these gentlemen find everywhere, we should live in an ecstatic languor, and die of coma'.

I will conclude with that remark of a critic who will certainly not be accused of want of soul or feeling for poetry: the instructed readers will judge whether it does not apply, with much stronger reason, to the increasingly immoderate manner of M. de Lamartine.

M. DE MONTALEMBERT, ORATOR

Monday, November 5, 1849.

I WOULD like to speak here of M. de Montalembert as an orator, from the point of view of talent, in order to apprehend and characterize the principal features of his eloquence. It is not a partisan who is speaking, still less an adversary; but one who has followed him from his first appearance upon the public stage with curiosity and interest, and soon with admiration and approval. This admiration, independent of the matter of his eloquence, soon became unanimous in all who heard him; but the various and repeated proofs he has given of his oratorical power in these last two years rank him definitively among the masters of speech. In consideration of so many other talents which waste their energies or wander along wrong paths, one is happy to meet with one that grows and rises in proportion to the difficulties and obstacles, which matures visibly day by day, which fulfils or even surpasses the best expectations.

Yet, I will say at once, if M. de Montalembert had remained purely and simply in the line he followed before February 1848, I should have experienced some difficulty in speaking of him in all freedom, even in any other place than the *Constitutionnel*. In fact, to consider him only in that already so well-filled career which he offered to our eyes during thirteen years in the bosom of the Chamber of Peers, I see in him a most distinguished orator, the advocate or rather the champion, the intrepid and splendid knight of a cause; but his whole development at that time turns upon two or three absolute, obstinate, almost fixed ideas: he defends Poland, he attacks the University, he demands unlimited freedom of ecclesiastical teaching, and for the religious Orders; he has two or three great

themes, or rather a single one, absolute liberty. This theme is for him a point of faith, a subject of conviction; so his eloquence is not that of an advocate, but of a believer, of an armed Levite, or better of a Crusader who has received the gift of persuasion. I seem to see him, on every question, marching straight against the opponent, with sword in hand and cuirass shining in the sunlight. With the erstwhile noble Chamber I most heartily admire and applaud all that is young, brilliant, adventurous in this tournament *à outrance*; they are orators' exploits; but I ask myself what might be the results. Only since 1848 has M. de Montalembert, accepting the lesson of events, ceased to be a party speaker and shown himself an entirely political speaker. Till then one admired him, and, unless a strict partisan, one did not follow him. Now, whatever the direction, one follows him willingly; one accepts not only the vibration and the brilliancy, but the sense of his noble words. He has ceased to see questions from a single aspect; he unites two contrary things, he combines. He has not lost his convictions, but he consents to enter into others' convictions, to reckon and compound with them. The result is an effort and a check by which his eloquence itself can only profit. He is too simple and unconstrained to obey only a single direct, impetuous inspiration; the beauty of human strength is to contain itself, to steer between the divers impulses and to unite contraries under one law. 'One shows one's greatness, Pascal said, not by being at one extreme, but by touching the two ends at the same time and filling the whole space between'. M. de Montalembert is no longer at one extreme; he has shown that he too could embrace opposite points and walk between the two. He has found room, in his mind, for a certain contrary. Whatever be the deep convictions within, that is a great step towards practical and applicable truth. True talent has no cause to repent of those contrarieties it imposes upon itself. Energy gains by caution; the ripest eloquence does not lose by it, and it henceforth comes to the aid of statesmanship, which is generally no more than a transaction. Since his last speeches, which are also the most eloquent, M. de Montalembert has proved it; he has deserved this eulogy, which M. Berryer gave him with his congratulations: 'You are

not an absolute, but a resolute spirit'. A generous praise which we entreat him to justify more and more and always.

M. de Montalembert began early and almost as a youth to show his power of speech. His long period of youth, which we have been accustomed to follow for eighteen years, is not yet closed; born in 1810, he is only thirty-nine years of age. Never was any youth or adolescence more readily listened to. A strange circumstance brought him into the public view in 1831. A disciple at that time of M. de Lamennais and a very active contributor to the *Avenir*, he won his first spurs there by demanding, in the name of the Charter, that full liberty of teaching which he has not ceased to claim since. In order the better to establish the right, he, with two of his friends, M. de Coux and the Abbé Lacordaire, opened a free school. The school was only open two days; the Commissary of Police came and closed it, and the three *schoolmasters* (as they called themselves) saw themselves arraigned in a police-court. This was precisely what they wanted, in order to challenge public discussion. But the death of M. de Montalembert's father, which occurred in the meanwhile, suddenly invested the young man with the prerogatives of the Peerage, and the case was carried before the High Court. Thus it was that M. de Montalembert, unexpectedly become a peer of France just on the eve of the abolition of heredity, made his début as an orator at the bar of the noble Chamber in September 1831, at the age of twenty-one, and under an accusation. But, looking at his youth, his good grace and his ease of manner, the elegant and incisive clearness of his speech and diction, one naturally forgot, and his judges were the first of all to forget, that they had to do with one on his trial; they saw only the beginnings of an orator. The whole Chamber listened, with a surprise not unmixed with pleasure, to the audacious words of the youth, and, looking only at the talent and the manner, they saw there above all pledges and future promises for their own body. They welcomed this last-born of heredity with the favour and almost the affection that a mother has for the youngest of her children. From this day M. de Montalembert, formally sentenced to a light fine, was veritably the bosom-child, the Benjamin, of the Peerage.

When he appeared four years later in this same Chamber, to take his seat with the privilege of voting and speaking, he had the right to say anything, to dare everything, by reason of that elegance of speech and delivery which never leaves him. He had full freedom to speak with the most passionate accents in favour of that liberty, the love of which was the only excess of his youth; he was able to unfold without interruption his absolute theories, which uttered by other lips would have caused a shudder, but coming from his almost pleased. He was able to give free expression even to his incisive, mordant, steel-like qualities, and with impunity show himself personal towards potentates and ministers. On one or two occasions, indeed, the Chancellor formally called him to order; but the favour which attached to talent covered everything. His bitterness (for he sometimes showed it) appeared in him almost like amenity. The harshness of the meaning was disguised by the beauty of the expression and the perfect bearing. In every circumstance, and whatever liberty he might take, he had but to thank the Chamber for allowing him, as M. Guizot put it one day, *the immense liberties of his speech*. Here I may be permitted a few observations which I could not help making during the years in which I studied from afar, in silence, this precocious and growing talent.

Many qualities, perhaps even some faults, are needed to make a great orator; or at least some of the qualities of the orator, when he starts very young in his career, may, before becoming real qualities, resemble faults. Thus confidence in his own idea, certainty in affirmation, before becoming really authoritative, may resemble temerity. I should lie to my thought if I did not say that this was sometimes the case with M. de Montalembert. Never did a young and talented orator, under pretence of laying his humility once for all at the feet of the Holy See, exercise with a surer conscience his power of disdain, sarcasm, irony, and wield more freely the weapon of scorn. Never did any one, under cover of a deep religious conviction, show less thought and consideration for an adversary. And since I am in the way of sincere critical remarks (and to whom could they be better applied than to the noble talent which is sincerity itself), I will also make a few on the substance.

M. de Montalembert, from the very first day, entered the lists, as I have said, with an absolute idea. As a mere boy he had taken a Hannibal's oath against the University, and had vowed eternal hatred and war. That was during eighteen years his reiterated and inveterate conclusion, his *Delenda Carthago*, as it was for Cato. He had turned Voltaire's phrase in an opposite direction, and he too exclaimed: *Écrasons l'infâme!* In crushing the University it was indeed the mortal enemy of Christianity, the hot-bed of unbelief, that he thought of exterminating. Greatly impressed by the gradual and increasing loss of ground that the Catholic faith was suffering among the young generations, the result of so many combined causes, M. de Montalembert, to put a stop to the evil, thought necessary to denounce it in its whole extent, to draw a sharp line of separation between the sound part and that which, according to him, was unsound. He strove consequently to draw up the army of Catholics in battle array, to drill and tutor, to sift and count them, at the risk of greatly diminishing them; he suppressed the neutrals. Hitherto every man in France who did not say: *I am not a Catholic*, was supposed to be one. He endeavoured to show that the majority of those men were not on his side, but on the enemy's. He aimed very decidedly at arranging the duel between what he called the *Sons of the Crusaders* and the *Sons of Voltaire*. By incessantly repeating: *We other Catholics*, instead of saying: *All we Catholics*, as one used to say; in representing himself and his partisans as being in a state of crying oppression and isolation, he gave rise to the thought that Catholicism in France might soon be no more than a great party, a great sect. I honour this plain dealing, I respect this Polyeucte faith, which rejects the lukewarm, and which, strong in a higher hope, challenges even an unequal combat, without any doubt about the victory; but, politically and morally, I should have preferred to leave matters a little more confused. Though one has proved to a multitude of honest people who thought that they were still Catholics, that they are not, what has one gained? After February 24, M. de Montalembert seems to have understood that, and it was with joy that people heard him, in his speeches of September 18 and 20, 1848, on the Liberty of Teaching,

consent to take the Christian religion independently of the degree of individual faith, to consider it more generally from the social point of view, and to accept as co-workers all those who, after the example of Montesquieu, envisage it by the same standard.

It was in the session of 1844, on the occasion especially of the introduction of the law on Secondary Education, that the orator took up, in the Chamber of Peers, the high position he has held since, that he decidedly stood forward as the chief of the Catholic party, the defender and in a slight degree the guide of the whole French clergy and episcopacy. It was a fine part to play for a young man of thirty-three, and he was able to fill it in all its height and breadth. In 1843 he had gone to the island of Madeira, in search of a climate favourable to the health of his young wife; there in his leisure hours he worked at a History of St. Bernard. On receiving news of the projected bill, that is to say of the danger, he hurled from that rock of Madeira a pamphlet in which he traced out for the Catholics their duties and the line of conduct to be followed in the present conjuncture. He returned from Madeira expressly to bear the burden of discussion, and went back afterwards to watch over his domestic affections, thus combining in a touching manner the duties of a private with those of a public man. It is this moral character which, spread over a whole life, adds much to a man's authority even in his youth.

After the session of 1844, M. de Montalembert's talent had but to expand; it had attained its full height. His speech of January 21, 1847, on the Incorporation of Cracow, will live as one of the most memorable on this sort of subject, made to inspire. I confess that I am always a little distrustful of what is called eloquence on such subjects, and I try above all to differentiate it from declamation. But here the eloquence is true and sincere; it is burning. Denouncing in scathing words the first partition of Poland, and laying down the principle that sooner or later injustice brings with it its punishment, the orator shows 'the oppressed nation which clings to the side of the oppressing power like an eternal, avenging sore'. And again, comparing that crushed people to the giant of antiquity smothered under Mount Etna: 'They

thought, he exclaimed, to destroy a people, and they created a volcano'. M. de Montalembert has a faculty which is lacking in many otherwise eloquent men, and which imparts to his phrase a ring unlike that of any others: he has the power of indignation. He has preserved in its original vivacity, his sense of justice and injustice. His heart really bleeds at certain sights, and his soul speaks through the sore. But his speech on Cracow was surpassed even by that of the following year, January 14, 1848, on Swiss affairs. Here the orator is fired by the approach of the great events of which he feels in advance the electric current: it is no longer of Switzerland, nor of cantonal sovereignty, nor of the Jesuits beyond the Jura, that he speaks; much does that concern him! he is thinking of ourselves: 'It is as one vanquished, he announces at the beginning, that I come to speak to vanquished men, that is to say to the representatives of the social order, of the regular order, of the liberal order which has just been vanquished in Switzerland, and which is threatened, in the whole of Europe, by an invasion of barbarians'. Once launched into this living vein, he does not again leave it, and his whole discourse was one direct, personal, prophetic appeal. It is often said of the power of speech that it transports, that it carries away its audience; never was the expression more applicable than in this case; there was never a more transporting speech. The noble Chamber was for a moment on the point of forgetting its gravity in a hitherto unexampled enthusiasm; all the reserved thoughts, ordinarily cautious and veiled, suddenly acknowledging their brilliant expression, revealed themselves. This last speech of M. de Montalembert may be said to have been the swan-song of the Chamber of Peers.

There might have been, however, a few observations to make, from the political or merely logical point of view, upon some parts of this discourse, if the general effect had not covered all. For example, the orator, in the midst of all the dangers he pointed out, continued to make his reservations in favour of entire and absolute liberty. He denounced the manifestations of what he called the excesses of radicalism in France, and he approved of their being tolerated. He sounded the trumpet of alarm, and he added at the same time: On no account

hasten to arms! That was a remnant of inconsequence and system which it required February 24 to make him, and many others, to shake off. Since then his fine talent, with the firmness, flexibility and vigour which distinguish it, with that art of presenting his thought from ever broad and clear aspects, with the brilliancy and magnificence of language which in him are not divorced from warmth of heart, has been placed entirely at the service not only of fine causes, of generous causes, but also of practicable and possible things. That is the point on which I love to insist. On June 22, 1848, he made his first speech before the National Assembly on the subject of property (on a bill for the resumption of the railways by the State); he gave expression to just, elevated, opportune considerations, in loyal and courageous language. In presence of an Assembly so novel to him, and after leaving that atmosphere of favour where his eloquence had been nursed without becoming enervated, he had a little apprenticeship to go through; it was done in an instant. Only on the score of gratitude has he now occasion to look back with regret on the Chamber of Peers; but these new Assemblies, so differently composed and so stormy, suit him to admiration; he does not fear interruptions, he likes them; he finds in them a *great honour*, he says, and a *great pleasure*. His power of irony and polished haughtiness, which on some occasions had rather exceeded the tone of the noble Chamber and possibly appeared out of proportion, here finds very suitable objects, and he lets no occasion escape him to exercise it; to the other qualities of the orator he adds that of repartee and appropriateness. Alluding to mistakes which had been committed and from which nobody could consider himself exempt, he said one day to one who was complimenting him, and whilst waiving the praise: 'We are now only an assembly of humble penitents'. But penitents like M. de Montalembert quickly rise up again, and I would not advise his adversaries to trust too much to his penitence. Remember that witty speech (January 12, 1849) in which he called upon the National Assembly to consent to their dissolution, entreating them in every tone, with a respect tempered with sarcasm. Interrupters evidently have nothing to gain from him.

In his speech on the Irremovability of Magistrates (April 10, 1849), we find M. de Montalembert on M. Dupin's ground, in agreement with him and lending him assistance for the first time perhaps. The passage of the speech where the *sacerdotal character* of the magistracy is taken and interpreted literally, and where the orator compares it, socially speaking, with the sacerdotal character of the priest; that double temple which it is important to uphold; that torrent of revolutions which should be hemmed in by at least two firm, immovable banks, and flow between the temple of law and the temple of God, all this is at once lofty eloquence and eternal statesmanship. Speaking on the law of the Press (July 21, 1849)—in that discussion in which even the talent of M. Thiers grew and added to its habitual qualities something of restraint and a spring of emotion—in this laborious discussion M. de Montalembert found occasion to loudly proclaim truths which had much weight and emphasis on his lips. It was the same feeling which, in his last speech on Roman affairs (October 19), made him proclaim with bitterness that the plainest result of anarchy was, not the dethronement of kings, but the dethronement of liberty. 'Kings have remounted their thrones, he exclaims sorrowfully; liberty has not remounted its throne; it has not remounted the throne it had in our hearts'. I have no words for this last discourse, which is still re-echoing. The passage on the Church, who is stronger the weaker she is, and who appears to be clothed in the inviolability of a woman and a mother; this pathetic movement must remain, even for those who only regard these things from a distance and from the point of view of beauty, as one of the happiest inspirations of eloquence.

In the speaker's tribune M. de Montalembert attains his effects without great efforts and as the result of a continuous development. He has a perfect ease of manner. He has few gestures, but he possesses the most essential of the parts which contribute to action; he has *voice*, a voice flowing pure and long in breath, clean and distinct in quality, clear and vibrating in tone, very well adapted to emphasize the generous or ironical intentions of the speech. The son of an English mother, we could imagine we heard in his voice, through the apparent

sweetness, a certain rising accentuation which is not unbecoming, which makes some of his words fall from a greater height and carry farther. I ask pardon for dwelling on these shades, but the ancients, our masters in everything, and especially in eloquence, brought a particular attention to them, and a great modern orator has said: 'One always has the voice of one's mind'. A man of clear, distinct, firm, generous, rather disdainful mind shows all that in his voice. Those whose voice is not the expressive organ, responsive to these smallest shades of the inner mind, are not made to produce, as orators, penetrating impressions.

Does M. de Montalembert improvise or does he partially recite? has he written out portions of the discourse beforehand, or only prepared them? These are questions which form part of the secret of each, and on which it would be difficult to pronounce by conjecture. If I have been well informed, M. de Montalembert, in his oratorical composition, has passed through the different phases which are familiar to those in the trade. At first, he began simply by writing his speeches and reading them, then by reciting them. The pen indeed is the first, as has been said, the surest of masters for fashioning speech.[1] Soon emboldened, he began to speak with simple notes, and, if I am not mistaken, to-day he combines these different manners, adding what pure improvisation never fails to furnish. The whole is wrapped in a sort of living circulation which allows of no perceptible interval, and which makes the jets of the moment, the meditated or noted thoughts, the prepared bits, join and link themselves together with flexibility, and more like the members of one body. Every orator who is really an orator always feels how much progress he still has to make before attaining that ideal which the greatest themselves have despaired of realizing. M. de Montalembert has therefore to gain in the future, especially if it is true, as Solon of ancient days remarked in some fine lines which he left us, that the perfect accord of thought and eloquence is only fully met with between the ages of forty-two and fifty-six. A broad and just observation which resembles a law! It might be confirmed by many living examples around us.

[1] "Stylus optimus et praestantissimus dicendi effector ac magister." Cicero (*De Oratore*, I, 53).

As a writer, M. de Montalembert published, in 1836, the *Histoire de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie*, a touching and pathetic legend of which he became enamoured while staying in Germany. He has translated Mickiewicz the poet's book of the *Polish Pilgrims*. He has also written something against the destroyers of Gothic monuments. But his great work, his capital work in prospect, is a *History of St. Bernard*, which has been long in preparation, and which his duties as a public man have hitherto prevented him from finishing. Two volumes, containing the preliminaries, on the formation, the development and the rôle of the Monastic Orders in the Middle Age, are in print, but not published. We see that it is not unity that is wanting in such a life.

COUNT HAMILTON [1]

Monday, November 12, 1849.

THE modern vice which has done most mischief perhaps in recent times is wordiness, declamation, the grand words which some played with and others took seriously, and which those were the very first to take seriously who played with them. I do not mean to say that this is the only malady we are suffering from, nor that it is not also combined with many others; but I think this evil has been for many years one of the most contagious, one of the most directly hurtful, and that to cure us of it would be to confer a great benefit. Anything that should contribute to restore to us our original clearness of expression, to deliver the French language and spirit from pathos and bombast, from the false colour and false lyricism which mingle with everything, would be a real service rendered not only to the taste, but also to the reason of the public. To accustom oneself to write as one speaks and thinks, does that not already mean to compel oneself to think rightly? After all, it never requires so much effort in France to return to that clearness, for not only is it in order with us, it constitutes the basis of the language and of the spirit of our nation; this clearness has been for centuries our tendency and evident quality, and, in the midst of all that has happened to corrupt it, we might still to-day find numerous and excellent evidences of it.

I will even go further and say that, whatever one may do, clearness is and ever will be of primary necessity in a quick and busy nation like ours, who want to understand at once and have not the patience to listen for long.

[1] *Masterpieces of French Literature.* (Collection Didot.) Hamilton.

Thus we find resources in our imperfections, and are brought back to our good qualities by our very defects.

Among the celebrated authors of our language, not all however are alike qualified to give us the impression and to show us the image of this perfect clearness. We might doubtless meet with examples of it in every age even in the old periods: witness Philippe de Commynes and Montaigne. In spite of the pedantry of spurious knowledge and the remnants of barbarism, the tendency and the turn peculiar to the French spirit did not fail to come to light, and the original natures gained the ascendency. Still, only after a certain more evenly illuminated epoch did this clearness become habitual and, we may say, universal with all good writers, and pass into general use. This epoch is pretty recent, and I cannot date it further back than the end of the seventeenth century. Only towards the middle of this century did French prose, which had done its grammar course with Vaugelas, and its rhetoric course under Balzac, suddenly emancipate itself and become the language of the perfectly educated man with Pascal. But there was necessarily a short interval before all could profit by that which a man of genius had first achieved, and which other superior society-trained minds, La Rochefoucauld, Retz, likewise practised, and before the new standard coin could circulate. La Bruyère decidedly marks the new era, and he inaugurates that kind of quite modern *régime* in which clearness of expression tries to combine with esprit properly so-called, and cannot absolutely dispense with if it desires to please. By the side of La Bruyère we might find other examples less striking, but perhaps more flowing and facile. Fénelon, in his non-theological writings, is the lightest and most graceful model of what we are in search of. A few women of distinction, too, with that tact which they receive from nature, did not wait for La Bruyère in order to show their lively and inimitable correctness in the familiar kinds of literature. He had the advantage of them in that he was conscious of what he was doing and of saying so. After this end of the seventeenth century and during the first half of the eighteenth, there came a period unique for its purity and fluency of prose-writing. When the second half of the century comes, after Jean-Jacques

Rousseau has appeared, the language is enriched with more elevated, more brilliant and quite new elements; it gains in respect of shades of impression and word-paintings, but declamation steps in at the same time; spurious exaltation and spurious sensibility become current. This declamation which we suffer from to-day has for more than a century assumed many forms; it has renewed its colours every twenty-five years; but it dates in the first place from Rousseau. In any case, between the end of La Bruyère or Fénelon and the beginnings of Jean-Jacques, is comprehended a calm, illuminated, moderate period, in which we find the language such as we speak of it now, or as we might speak it, and such that it has not yet become antiquated. 'Our prose, says Lemontey, stopped at the point where, being neither chopped up nor periodic, it became the most flexible and elegant instrument of thought'. As a lover of literature one may assuredly prefer other prose epochs to that one; it would not be difficult to point to moments when this prose appeared to put on a grander and more ample dress, and shine with greater brilliancy; but, for habitual and general use, I know nothing more perfect, nothing more convenient and better adapted for intercourse than the language of that date. The chief names I meet with at first sight are Le Sage, the Abbé Prévost, Mme. de Staal (de Launay), Mme. Du Deffand, Fontenelle, Vauvenargues, lastly Montesquieu, and Voltaire already in all his variety and richness. I meet even, at the beginning, the incomparable author of the Memoirs, Saint-Simon, and a unique story-teller with whom I will stop to talk to-day, the most amiable Hamilton.

Anthony Hamilton, one of the most Attic writers in our literature, is neither more nor less than an Englishman, of Scotch descent. We have seen other foreigners, Horace Walpole, the Abbé Galiani, the Baron de Besenval, the Prince de Ligne, who possessed or simulated the French esprit to admiration; but as for Hamilton, he had it in a degree that it eclipsed everything else, he was that esprit itself. Reared at an early age in France, afterwards living at the semi-French Court of Charles II, at all times a disciple of Saint-Évremond and the Chevalier de Grammont, possessing a vein of Cowley, Waller and Rochester,

in him were only blended the most choice elements in the two races. England, which had taken Saint-Évremond from France, made restitution in the person of Hamilton. France had reason to be satisfied. Louis XIV gave subsidies to Charles II, he also gave him a mistress: the emigration of James II made a return to Louis by giving him a great warrior, Berwick, and what is rarer, a charming writer, the airy chronicler of the elegant world.

What do we know of the life of Hamilton? Very little.[1] He is supposed to have been born about the year 1646, in which case he would be a little younger perhaps than La Bruyère, and a little older than Fénelon. He was in the prime of his life at that Court of Charles II. which he has so graphically described; but the Hamiltons he speaks of are his brothers, and he gives himself no part to play in the Memoirs. Whatever rôle he might have taken, he had especially that of an observer. Gifted with a keen sense of the ridiculous and the most discriminating social tact, he distinguished the lightest shades and fixed them with a light ineffaceable touch. He does not scruple to admit that he was always ready to amuse himself at the expense of those who deserved it. Having come to France at the time of the Revolution of 1688, in the following of his lawful king, he lived in the best society, making up for the tedium of the little pious Court of Saint-Germain by visits to the Berwicks and the Grammonts. He composed couplets in the taste of Coulanges; he wrote letters to his friends in prose mixed with verse in the style of Chaulieu. He was intimate with the latter, he associated with the Vendômes and frequented the society of the Temple. We see him sought after at Sceaux, where the Duchesse du Maine held a plenary court of bel-esprit. Dangeau wrote to him, in reference to a letter to Berwick which was filled with delicate eulogies: 'They were relished by all the polite society at Marly'.

But this kind of vogue would not have led beyond being appreciated by his friends and the companies he

[1] One may read a pleasing article on Hamilton in the second volume of the *Histoire de la Littérature française à l'étranger*, by M. Sayous, 1853. In spite of all the researches of the ingenious author, these are critical views rather than new facts.

enlivened, and would not even have procured him a distinct individuality in the chronicles of the time. Speaking of the expedition of the Pretender in 1708, and the gentlemen who were to take part in it, Saint-Simon vaguely mentions Hamilton: 'The Hamiltons, he says, were brothers of the Comtesse de Grammont, among the first gentlemen of Scotland, brave and full of wit, faithful. Through their sister they associated much with the best society of our Court; they were poor and had their good stamp of singularity'. Here we find Hamilton confounded with the rest of his family, and the only distinction accorded them generally in their description is a *good stamp of singularity*. We should have known no more about him, if it had not occurred to him, in 1704, when already advanced in years, to divert the Comte de Grammont, then over eighty years of age and still amiable, by writing the youthful adventures of the latter when he was the Chevalier de Grammont, and to constitute himself jestingly his Quintus Curtius and his Plutarch.

This is the only work of Hamilton which still merits reading; for his verses and even his Tales deserve little attention. His verses, though commended by Voltaire, who took upon himself to supersede them, praised even by Boileau, who must have grumbled when he wrote that polite letter, are quite antiquated for us and nearly unreadable: they are mere strings of rhymes with here and there a happy touch standing out. How comes it that works of the intellect, which satisfied good judges at their birth, contain so much that decays with time and becomes antiquated? In every man of wit who is nothing more there is something of Voiture; by Voiture I mean that spirit of fashion which has but a season and is withered by a breath; there is much Voiture in Hamilton's verses.

Do not look to Hamilton for pure poetry. He has the poetry of his day when trifling; he knows the right dose that the French intellect can stand at that date: *Quels que soient leurs ornements*, he says—

> Dans un récit de longue haleine
> Les vers sont toujours *ennuyants*.

He loves Horace, but he appears to know nothing of

Milton. Shakespeare seems not to have existed for him. Only it seems as if the amiable sprite Ariel had disguised himself to surprise him, and, without naming himself, slipped into his prose.

His Tales might have had something perhaps of Ariel's fantasticalness, if they had been clearer. He composed them as the result of a society wager to divert his sister, the Comtesse de Grammont, and in emulation of the *Arabian Nights* which were appearing at that time (1704–1708); they are full of allusions which escape us.[1] All through them one feels an element of naturalness and piquancy. The Duc de Lévis, who tried to continue them, is merely insipid. To give an idea of them by comparison with a modern production, I should refer the reader to the pretty fantasy of the *Merle blanc* of Alfred de Musset.

But in the *Memoirs of Grammont* we have something which survives, and which the fairy has touched with all her grace. Their manner seems expressly created to explain the words of Voltaire—

> La grâce en s'exprimant vaut mieux que ce qu'on dit.

The substance is thin, not exactly frivolous, as has been said; it is not more frivolous (though so light) than anything that has for its theme the human comedy. There are big treatises which do not look frivolous and are more so than these *Memoirs*. The hero of them is the Chevalier, afterwards Comte de Grammont, the most fashionable man of his day, the ideal of the French courtier at a period when the Court was everything, the type of that light, brilliant, supple, alert, indefatigable character, repairing all errors and follies by a sword thrust or a witticism: our century has seen some splendid survivals of the type in the Vicomte Alexandre de Ségur and the Comte Louis de Narbonne. The characteristic of that light-hearted race was never to belie themselves. Grammont, dangerously ill, and urged to become converted by Dangeau, sent by the King, turns to his wife, herself very pious, and says: 'Countess, if you do not take care, here is Dangeau who will cheat you out of my conversion'. Which did not prevent his conversion being

1 For a key to his tale *le Bélier*, for example, one should read Saint-Simon's *Memoirs*, vol. iv., pp. 11–13 (1829).

sincere enough in the end. These are some of the touches which depict to the life a refined but strongly tempered race. And was it not worthily represented in the Russian campaign by M. de Narbonne?

But Grammont in himself concerns us little. Though the hero of Hamilton's story, he is very often only the pretext. It is the manner in which he is exhibited that forms all its charm. The envious (and Bussy was among them), whilst acknowledging in Grammont a gallant and delicate wit, added that 'his looks and tone very often gave point to what he said, *which became as nothing in the mouth of another*'. Hamilton has prevented this prophecy from coming true, and has restored to Grammont all his tone, if he has not indeed lent him some. His manner of telling and relating is incomparable, easy and felicitous, joining the familiar to the rare, with a perpetual and almost imperceptible raillery, an irony which glides and is not insistent, a slander which is perfect. He says somewhere of the Duke of Buckingham who was paying his court to a beauty: 'She by no means hated slander; he was the father and mother of it; he composed vaudevilles, he invented old wives' tales, which she was madly fond of. But his peculiar talent was to catch people's absurdities and mimic their speech, to imitate them in their presence without their perceiving it. In short, he could act all sorts of parts with so much grace and charm, that he was indispensable when he took the trouble to please'. In this portrait I think I can catch a reflexion of Hamilton himself; but it is especially when he is depicting his sister, the beautiful Miss Hamilton who married Grammont, it is on this happy page among so many others that he unconsciously puts in a few touches which I attribute to himself, and apply not to his muse (these are solemn words which are unsuitable in his case), but to his charm as a writer. 'She had, he says, an open brow, white and smooth, hair well planted, and docile to that natural arrangement which costs so much pains to invent. A certain freshness, which borrowed colours cannot imitate, composed her complexion. Her eyes were not large, but they were bright, and her looks expressed all that she wished; her mouth was full of charm, and the outline of her face perfect. A little refined and retroussé nose was not the smallest

ornament of a quite pleasing face. Her mind was almost like her person. Not by those aggressive vivacities whose sallies only dazzle, did she seek to shine in conversation. She avoided still more that affected slowness in speech, whose heaviness acts as a soporific; but, without eagerness to speak, *she said what was necessary, and no more'*. That is the impression which he himself makes upon me, with his perfect diction. Shall I add that, even in his sister's portrait, this malicious pen does not refrain from an insinuation on her hidden beauties, which proves that, when it suits his purpose, his indiscretion respects nothing? But he hits the mark to a nicety, and expresses himself in such a way as to make anything pass. We have since had Memoirs of courtiers and celebrated dandies. The Maréchal de Richelieu, that spoiled child of the eighteenth century and of Voltaire, that last type of the eternal courtier, who succeeded to the Comte de Grammont, also wished to have his historian. Soulavie, using his notes, wrote volumes full of scandal, of diverting and more or less vulgar adventures. But though another than the unworthy Soulavie, though Rulhière in person had held the pen, he would have contributed nothing but what could have been foreseen and guessed; he would have brought in sarcasm and good taste. But the bloom of this kind of writing was gone. I know not if there has been more than one Comte de Grammont, but there is only one Hamilton.

There is besides only one age for certain happy works. That a smooth and polished mind, keen and shrewd, spreading over things and his neighbours a general light raillery, that such a mind should be born, is not enough. Everything around should be so disposed as to favour him; the climate should be prepared in some sort; in the midst of the fools and clowns who swarm in the world, and even in the highest society, there should be gathered together a chosen band of well matched intellects, who should form a group in a corner, and be able to listen and reply; if he speaks low, nothing should be lost; if he says no more than necessary, one should not ask more nor above all too much. From the second half of the eighteenth century the world changed in this respect; declamation gained the upper hand, and it became necessary to adopt a certain false high pitch.

Minds of Hamilton's measure would after that time have been less highly appreciated and would have had to force their tone to be heard. At the rate the world is going, is this species of rare minds vanishing? Not absolutely, I do not think so; but they will not be in such a good light, and will become less and less conspicuous. Those minds will have more and more reason to suffer, especially if they should come to be transplanted out of their element into a state of self-styled civilization, where a shout gets the better of a smile, where everything has to be emphasized with all one's force, and where a witticism often needs a speaking-trumpet.

Meanwhile, it is profitable from time to time to renew one's taste for those facile authors whom one has ready at hand, and who have not become in any way antiquated. 'This work, Voisenon said, speaking of the *Memoirs of Grammont*, is at the head of those one should read regularly every year'. That is a better piece of advice than we should have expected from Voisenon. Charm, I know, cannot be counselled, cannot be learned, and to try to copy it would be to misunderstand its nature. It is good, however, to talk of it sometimes, to turn around it; some of it always clings. To analyse these *Memoirs of Grammont* would be an ungrateful and disagreeable task, since it is the turn of expression which makes it precious, and the story, after a certain moment, proceeds a little as God pleases. The adventures at the beginning are the most agreeable and connected. The first loss in gambling to the horse-dealer at Lyons, the Chevalier's revenge at the siege of Trin, that game with the Comte de Caméran, when the provident trickster secretly obtains the support of a detachment of infantry, are comedy scenes quite ready made. One feels at once how much moral ideas have changed in these matters, when the historian is capable even in jest of glorifying his hero for transactions in which honour was so much at stake. It is true that when Hamilton, at the end of the age of Louis XIV, recounted the first exploits of his Chevalier under Richelieu, he was already speaking of another age, and of things so to say fabulous; and they were not so likely to be taken seriously. Still, even the Abbé Prévost did not think he was entirely lowering the Chevalier des Grieux in the mind of his

readers, when he made him commit the like peccadillos. Let us then boldly conclude that on this point of morality we are better. The persons whom Hamilton meets on his way and exhibits to us, immediately become alive. Who does not remember, as if he had seen them, the grotesque Cerise, the honest governor Brinon, and especially Matta, the Chevalier's second, Matta so natural, so heedless, so full of sallies ? He had no brains to speak of, says Retz ; but Hamilton put his naïve thoughtlessness into action, and makes us like him. At Turin, gallantry commences ; the fair ladies are mentioned by name, and it is still another characteristic moral feature that these *Memoirs* were able to appear in 1713, that is to say during Hamilton's lifetime, with all these proper names and gallant revelations, without any scandal resulting. The world was more easy-going then than now on certain subjects. When his hero passes over to the English Court, the historian's manner changes a little ; we enter upon a series of portraits and a complication of adventures, in which one has some difficulty at first in finding one's way. Unity ceases ; we get the reminiscences of Grammont and those of Hamilton at the same time, and they become entangled and cross each other. But with a little attention one at last feels at home, as at a Court ball, in the midst of that *rout* of English beauties, the most refined and aristocratic in the world, whom the painter has rendered with distinction in their most delicate nuances. I have before my eyes the magnificent edition executed in London in 1792, with its numerous engraved portraits ; I see those various beauties filing past, the squadron of the maids of honour of the Duchess of York and of the Queen ; I read again the text on the opposite page, and I find that it is again the writer with his pen who is the better painter : ' This lady, he says of a certain Mrs. Wetenhall, is what is properly called a quite English beauty ; kneaded of lilies and roses, of snow and milk in respect of colours ; made of wax in respect of arms and hands, neck and feet ; but all this without soul and without air. Her face was of the daintiest, but it was always the same face : one might have supposed that she took it out of its case every morning and replaced it on retiring to bed, without ever having made use of it during

the day. What can you expect? nature had made her a doll in infancy; and a doll she remained till death, the white Wetenhall'. So of one, so of the others; no two are alike. Hamilton is not the Van Dyck of this Court; he has not the gravity of the great royal painter; but he is a unique painter whose brush is endowed with voluptuousness, shrewdness and malice. The roguish Ariel sports and frolics through all this part of the Memoirs, and often delights in entangling the skein. What mystifications, what mad stories, what pretty episodes all through this growing embroglio! What an ironical contrast between this life of youth and the final expiation at Saint-Germain! The last page, in which these caprices of love and chance are summed up in marriage, forms a wonderful termination to this graceful story, which was beginning to drag a little towards the close.[1]

The style, generally felicitous, natural, careless, delicate without any préciosité, does not fail to appear a little super-refined and dazzling in two or three places, suggesting the approach of the eighteenth century. I might pass over the President Tambonneau, who had come to England to shine, returning to France, when he saw that he was wasting his pains, and *to the feet of his first habits*, meaning of his first mistress; but it exceeds the bounds to say of the dandy Jermyn that he is in his whole person only a *moving trophy of the favours and liberties of the fair sex.* Crébillon fils might have envied him that trophy. We might note two or three similar touches of a doubtful taste, and it would be only serving the mocker right, who pardons nothing.

In a word, the eighteenth century begins with Hamilton. He already has the short sentence of Voltaire. Bossuet has left this world, just in time, at the moment of Hamilton's writing (1704). With La Fare, Sainte-Aulaire, Chaulieu, he belongs to that little group of chosen voluptuaries which marks the boundary of the two periods. He almost comes in contact with the *Lettres Persanes*, pub-

[1] In a letter to Murray (Ravenna, October 12, 1820), Lord Byron wrote on the subject of his *Don Juan*, and of what the women said of it: '... The truth is, that it is *too true*, and the women hate everything which strips off the tinsel of *sentiment*; and they are right, as it would strip them of their weapons. I never knew a woman who did not hate *De Grammont's Memoirs* for the same reason: even Lady (Oxford) used to abuse them'.

lished a year after his death (1721). But, in the *Lettres Persanes,* pleasantry already attacks serious things, and assumes an acrimony which Montesquieu afterwards regretted. Hamilton only jests, at least with pen in hand, at light things, and mocks in an undertone. He is one of those lively and happy spirits who pleasingly adorn the beginning of the century, long before the declamatory period which opens with Rousseau, and before the propaganda which flares up with Voltaire. An Epicurean on so many points perhaps, he has at least the wisdom to feel that, in order to be an Epicurean at his ease, it is not necessary that all the world should be the same. Among his followers I should rank a little confusedly, and saving the difference of ages, a few names I meet with in those years, the President Hénault, the President de Maisons, the Comte des Alleurs, and the son of Bussy, that Bishop of Luçon who was declared to be the god of good company and pleasanter than his father. That I would call Hamilton's retinue. Join to it Mme. Du Deffand. When dedicating to her the édition de luxe of a hundred copies which he caused to be printed of the *Memoirs of Grammont,* Horace Walpole said with good reason that she recalled the author of them by the charm and quality of her mind.

Hamilton died at Saint-Germain on April 21, 1720, aged about seventy-four years, with feelings of great piety, so it is reported, and after receiving the sacraments; at the point of death he again became a man of the seventeenth century. A few *Réflexions* in verse, which are found at the end of his poetry, testify indeed that, like La Fontaine, he had his day of sincere repentance. I read in the *Anecdotes littéraires* of the Abbé de Voisenon some words about Hamilton, which seem to need an explanation: 'The Comte de Caylus, who often saw him at his mother's, says this Abbé, assured me more than once that he was not amiable'. Is it possible that Hamilton was not amiable in company, and could we believe it, in spite of all possible testimonies? When the Comte de Caylus saw him at his mother's house, Hamilton was perhaps old, fatigued perhaps; besides, one is ready to conceive him at all times as capricious, of rather uneven temper, like his sister; he had that *stamp of singularity* of which Saint-Simon speaks. He

says somewhere that he is very well able to hold his tongue, or rather that he is not too fond of speaking. With his malicious causticity, and that thin lip we know he had, he required silence around him, and on the day when Caylus saw him at his mother's, there was doubtless a little too much noise and youth.

I hope, on the appearance of the modern reprints of our classical writers, to take the liberty of returning from time to time to those authors of bygone days, who are still the most living of all.

MM. VILLEMAIN AND COUSIN [1]

Monday, November 19, 1849.

In associating these two names so often united, already very ancient and ever present, I will approach them here from one point only, and will consider MM. Villemain and Cousin solely as literary critics, the two most eloquent critics of the present time, who have just collected their claims to this title in the eyes of the public in carefully corrected and revised works. It is in itself a salutary example to see men so favoured by renown concentrating their thoughts in order to impart to works which have long ago had their success, and have no need to wait for the favour of the public, that degree of perfection and finish which is noticeable only to attentive readers, and only appreciated after a close study. I see in this a proof that these rare minds have preserved in its integrity the literary religion, the faith in the morrow, in what was anciently called posterity. That is a kind of religion which, like other religions, has become only too weakened in men's souls, and the want of which is translated in practice into one too evident fact: how many are there among those who write to-day who try to do their best?

M. Villemain admonishes us at the outset and counsels us, by his own example, to be of that small number. He, so gifted by nature, does not trust it however beyond a certain degree. To the first expression, always so ready to hand with him and so living, he joins the thought-out expression, and for his brilliantly rapid words he imperceptibly substitutes the perpetuity of style. He

[1] *Œuvres Littéraires de M. Villemain.* (Collection Didier, 10 vols.) *Œuvres Littéraires de M. Cousin.* (3 vols.)

has, then, revised his old Courses of lectures, completed them and singularly enriched them in their detail. He has also arranged his literary Miscellanies in a more methodic order, and assorted them in a pleasing manner. But, in this Collection, which we have before our eyes, there are two portions among others which deserve to be distinguished and recommended above all: they are the four volumes which treat of the eighteenth century, and also the important volume which offers a tableau of the Christian Eloquence of the fourth century.

I know no more interesting reading, among the serious books of our age, than that of these four volumes on the eighteenth century, as they are presented in their final arrangement. Of the original language they preserve a sort of general animation, an ease and flow; but the style has henceforth all the precision and all the finish that the most fastidious may desire; the thought on every point has its solidity and its shade. We are led without interruption from the first somewhat timid steps of La Motte and Fontenelle, through the triumphant conquests and temerities of their successors, to the appearance on the scene of Mme. de Staël and M. de Chateaubriand, who close for us that great epoch in which Voltaire reigned. The writer has allowed himself every development in the interval, and denied himself none of the digressions or views which were able to add greatness to his subject or illuminate it. More than once we cross over into England, or rather, we do not cease to embrace it in the same glance and parallel with France, and to trace the history of literature and eloquence in England during the whole century, from Bolingbroke to Mr. Pitt. The author's profound knowledge of antiquity brings appropriate comparisons, happy questions, all new by virtue of being antique, and full of freshness. With Pope we are carried back to Homer; La Chaussée and his drama is an occasion for calling up Menander. M. Villemain excels in those translations which render so well the spirit of one language without injury to that of the other. Whilst avoiding none of the important aspects of his subject, the author is particularly successful in those places which demand an exquisite literary sense. He is incomparable in discovering and pointing out those veiled originalities which combine with a part of

imitation and blend with it, Pope's originality, for example. The moderate portraits, as those of Gresset, Daguesseau, Vauvenargues, are touched with a perfect grace and caught with a light hand.

The tableau of the Christian Eloquence and of the Church during the first centuries transports us to a quite different world. Direct teachings, however, and comparisons with ourselves are not wanting; they stand out from almost every page, and we may perceive, in a dress and language which hardly disguise it, our own social evil, our moral malady, if not our remedy. This volume on the Fathers has been for several years a favourite study of the author, a sort of semi-literary and semi-religious retreat. When quite a youth, and shining with every kind of success, he had approached this subject from a sort of caprice of taste, in order to extract its bloom and give us the perfume. On returning to it this time with a redoubled study and a singular affection, he has thoroughly penetrated it and extracted from it abundant treasure. Henceforth, after these really admirable analyses and translations, we shall know Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, Chrysostom, by the characters of their talent and speech as distinctly as we know Bourdaloue and Massillon. The author, who understands everything, but instinctively feels eloquence better than poetry has succeeded on this occasion in penetrating into this rather gloomy and already veiled poetry which, in some of the Fathers, in Gregory of Nazianzen especially, appears to harmonize so well with the sufferings of the soul and the world. 'The fine genius of Greece, he says, seems obscured; a cloud has veiled her light; but that is a moral progress which Christianity brought into the world, a progress of sorrow for oneself and of charity for others. The heart of man gained more in this labour than his imagination lost; Gregory of Nazianzen is a proof of it'. Dare I say it? reading this volume, it appeared to me that a portion of this praise might be applied to M. Villemain himself. Without losing any of its former charms, his talent has gained by a shade of melancholy which it did not know before and which sets it off. We think we perceive in these quite serious, much expanded pages, which reveal no trace of literary restlessness, that indescribable air of finish which is

imparted to talent by the knowledge of the hidden evil and the ordeal of sorrow itself. When first the brilliant writer approached these so complicated and at times so gloomy spheres of study, he had only known the favours of life, and had culled from it an easily won applause. 'A profane reader, he said, I searched in those theological libraries for the manners and the genius of nations. . . .' To rightly appreciate the genius of Ambrose and Augustine during those extreme ages of human calamity and agony, it was necessary to have advanced a step further, and to return to them with the consciousness that one has oneself not been a stranger to anything human. That is the progress, both moral and literary, that I think I perceive in more than one passage of this study, which has to-day become a book. M. Villemain is no longer the *profane reader* he spoke of. Not only does he make eloquent things to shine in our eyes, he touches deep things with emotion.

M. Villemain admires much, and no one knows better than he to vary the forms and aspects of admiration, so as never to make it tedious and monotonous. The art of praising, somebody has remarked, is one of the rarest proofs of literary talent, and a much surer and more delicate sign than the whole art of satire. 'It is a great sign of mediocrity, Vauvenargues said, to praise moderately'. M. Villemain, in this study of the Fathers and this tableau of their eloquence, gives them much praise; and, what is the acme of the art, by means of this praise extended to all, he is yet able to show them distinct from one another and leave them recognizable by us.

On the literary tableau properly speaking, in which kind he excels, and on the tableau he gives us of the eighteenth century in particular, I will take the liberty of making only one remark, in picking out a trait of character that one cannot pass over when speaking of the celebrated critic who has been the master of our age. The proper function of critics in general, as their name sufficiently indicates, is to judge, and when needfu to decide, to pass sentence. Take all the important men to whom this title of critic has been applied hitherto, Malherbe, Boileau (for both were critics under the form of poets); Dr. Johnson in England; La Harpe with us

even M. de Fontanes: all these men, who enjoyed authority in their time, judged matters of taste with vivacity, with too much exclusion perhaps, but after all with a clear, decisive, irresistible sense. Boileau had *hatred of a foolish book*, and could not help making game of it. On the other hand, when he had to deal with a work which he judged to be good, he openly took its side, he defended it against the insults of fools on every occasion. Fontanes did the same, in his manner: he passionately vindicated *Les Martyrs*, so much attacked at its birth, and gave the signal to admire it. Since then, things have changed much; criticism has become historic rather, and as it were eclectic in its judgments. It has exposed much, it has comprehended all, it has concluded little. M. Villemain has more than anybody contributed to force and keep it along this path which, in many respects, is wider, more fruitful, but which at times also, through being too wide, ends nowhere. Thus in this literary tableau of the eighteenth century, when he has to judge *La Henriade*, he gives every good reason for not admiring it, for not ranking it in any degree by the side of the epic works which endure; but when it is a question of passing formal sentence, he recoils, he wavers; the judge makes off, and in four or five quite evasive passages, he tries to hope that *La Henriade will traverse the ages*, that *it is after all an enduring work*, that it holds a rank *apart, a first place after the original works.* He returns to it four or five times, instead of making a clear and quick decision once for all, as his own reasoning authorized him to do. That is a weak side of this rare mind. His judgments, so exquisite at the beginning, are difficult to grasp in their conclusion; it would be necessary to seize them in their flight as it were, in the state of charming epigrams, or to extricate them oneself from the rich sinuosities in which he displays them. That is true above all as soon as he treats of living authors. His delicacy increases, to the extent of almost alarming mine at this moment. He then likes to proceed by implications, by allusions. In his excellent annual Reports to the Academy, good judges who are able to grasp all the intention are satisfied; in consideration of the public and those who are not critical, one would like more relief in the judgments.

But, in the ensemble and the details of this literary criticism conceived from the historical point of view, and, as such, so new and so broadly comprehended, what wealth! what range! what fertility! I see in it something that recalls Cicero's vast intelligence applying itself to Letters, recalling it not only for its capacity and range, for the charm of its invention and the fine economy of its memory, for the winding stream of its speech and for the perpetual flowers of the wayside, but also for certain weak points which are not without their charm. That mind with its clear and rapid precision, from which a word of sincere praise readily awarded would be a real commendation, is itself sensible to the approbation of others, as if he had not in himself a superior judgment to satisfy him. At a time when eminent men do not generally sin by an excess of diffidence, that is an almost pathetic trait.

I shall presently have some words to say of his style, of that ornate, elegant, ingenious and pure style which is both derived from tradition, and has a small share of modernity; but I have first to characterize, by opposition, the manner of M. Cousin, from the time when, without deserting philosophy but still devoted to it, he openly took up a position in pure literary criticism.

M. Cousin, entirely occupied with perfection, and with that sense of the best which is the soul of great talents, has during recent years revised and collected his Lectures and fragments of philosophy in a dozen little volumes, sometimes attractive in spite of their subject, or at least full of variety and interest. Literature might already assert a claim to a good part of it; there are above all certain pages on the *Beautiful* which are among the most memorable in the best pages in our language. But it is in his direct literary labours that it is most convenient to us to approach M. Cousin, and that is the more important because, for some time, this powerful mind has caused quite a revolution in criticism. This revolution, in two words, is as follows:—

The age of Louis XIV is already far distant; still, until quite recent times, correct writers, those who aspired to the title of classics, flattered themselves not only on recalling it, but on continuing it. MM. Auger and Roger, and many others, had that naïve illusion. On

the day when somebody first dared to say that the literature of Louis XIV was an admirable, but an *ancient* literature, there was an outcry and an uproar that I can still remember. Already in 1818 a writer, not very popular but elevated (Ballanche) had the temerity to say: 'Our literature of the age of Louis XIV has ceased to be an expression of society; it is therefore beginning to be already for us in some sort ancient literature, *archaeology*'. Well! the revolution introduced by M. Cousin into literary criticism consists precisely in treating the period of the seventeenth century as if it were already an antiquity, in studying and, where needful, restoring its monuments, as one would do in the matter of archaeology The application of the name *ancients* to Pascal and Racine, which, in our mouth, might look like an epigram or a piece of blasphemy, coming from him has become a sign of homage and piety. No man was better qualified than he, indeed, to be enamoured of the language of the grand century and to claim it for his own: he is certainly, of all the writers of our age, the one who best renews its forms, and who with his pen seems most naturally to revive its greatness. M. Cousin had early a double instinct, a double almost contradictory passion. He is a man who is able to occupy himself with texts, to search manuscripts, to interest himself in scholia and commentaries, and to transcribe them with the minutest particulars, to remit neither to himself nor to another a single variant or reading; and, through all this, he soars, embraces, generalizes, he has the conceptions of an artist and the passions of an orator. We had before us a dusty and subtle text, some obscure parchment which required deciphering, and suddenly we see a statue rise up. As long as he only took for his theme Proclus or even Plato, it did not so much concern us; but the method has become very appreciable to us as soon as we saw it applied to Pascal, to Pascal's sister, to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to Mme. de Longueville. At first it seemed as if he only tried to give us more exact texts, a few letters or papers discovered in the recesses of a library, and behold he has raised before our eyes, in their full height, grand figures, or reanimated charming faces with life. Such is M. Cousin's talent and art. By restoring the corrupted texts of the editions of Pascal,

or by showing that an analogous labour might be applied to almost all our classical authors, he has created what we might call French philology, and he has thrown a passion into it at its birth.

Thanks to him henceforth, a mass of details which seemed to belong to the exclusive province of bibliographers and editors, and of which the latter made only a very limited and barren use, have assumed a meaning and a life which connects them with literary history. We learn to penetrate more deeply into the secrets of composition of our great authors. The different phases through which prose passed since the end of the sixteenth century are illuminated with precision; the smallest variations of rule in the successive forms and vogues of the language are fixed with a certain method and rigour, by the study not only of a few celebrated writers but also of many writers of a secondary rank though still agreeable, who had been little thought of. In a word, the composition and constitution of French prose during the last two centuries is placed in its full light.

Among the writers who offer evidence to the language, M. Cousin has applied himself by predilection to a class of witnesses who are the more sure because they show less premeditation and consciousness, as it were, of being witnesses. I am speaking of the women who have written, and there is a large number of them who fill the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. In his fine library, which he enriches every day, M. Cousin has set his heart on collecting the smallest productions of those more or less celebrated women, their little novels or tales, their published or unedited letters. We have not forgotten the charming pages set at the head of his study of Jacqueline, Pascal's sister; there he has traced with a loving ardour quite a plan of a brilliant gallery': 'Shall I ever accomplish, he said, that idea of a gallery of illustrious women of the seventeenth century? It is at least a dream which serves as a relaxation after my labours, a charm in my solitude. On the shelves of my library I collect what remains of some of these women; I gather shreds of unpublished correspondence or of manuscript memoirs which illuminate and render more distinct the features of many a face which is dear to me'. Bibliography, we must admit,

was not accustomed to be treated with an inspiration of this kind. Charles Nodier in his time introduced into it a fantastic imagination and a charming frenzy: but here we have the utility of the end under the ideal of passion.

M. Cousin, when opening up this path with so much brilliance, has deserved to be followed along it with ardour. A number of labourers are at work after him in the same direction, and some with success. The old style of academic Eulogy is dethroned; it has decidedly given place to the erudite notice, to the dissertation and the almost grammatical dissection of each author. I will take the liberty, however, whilst pointing out this vein and calling it felicitous in the man who discovered it, to indicate the abuses which may result from it. If this vein is too unreservedly followed up, the danger lies in the critics dispensing too much with views and ideas, and especially with talent. Having brought into publicity some hitherto unedited document, he might think himself exempted from the possession of taste. The aperçu, that brief exposition, will run the risk of being stifled under the document. M. Cousin has the power of imparting value to the unpublished pieces he discovers, to the smallest philosophical relics he publishes; he frames them in gold. But after him, beside him, what will be the end of this growing fashion? As long as the master is there, I am tranquil, and, as long as I read him, I am charmed; but I fear the disciples. Can it be that the era of the scholiasts has already commenced for France, and that henceforth it will be our capital work to draw up our inventory? That is a prognostic which I try in vain to put aside. Yes, I fear at times lest the master, with his magnificent style, may be erecting the columns of the Parthenon to form a façade to a school of Byzantines.

I think I hear him here replying that this incline down which we are descending is a fatal law for every literature which has endured long and has already had several centuries of bloom and renascence; that meanwhile one should make the most of each age, demand of it the work for which it is best adapted; and that, besides, we shall not on that account have come down to the level of the Byzantine school, that we are only at that of the

Alexandrian. But, once again, my remark refers to the disciples only, and not to the master.

His grand style covers all and sets off all. What is the exact relation between the style of M. Cousin and that of M. Villemain? In what respects do the two manners resemble each other, in what respects do they differ? I will dare to compare them the more readily because I shall not here come to any real decision, and because, after weighing all, I can only admire on both sides without inclining to any preference. M. Cousin's style appears greater; his lines are more open, his drawing is broader; he gives himself at first sight more horizon. But there are certain details of which he takes no account, which he neglects. Like a sculptor, he chooses his point of view, and sacrifices everything else to it. M. Villemain's style, broad and fine, advances like a wave; he leaves no point of thought without embracing and investing it. He is all variety in shades of colour, in unexpected encounters, in happy expressions. If in places he betrays a little uneasiness and uncertainty, as soon as he is in the thick of his subject, he becomes entirely grave and fine. I am of opinion that one is always of one's time, even those who appear to be least so. M. Villemain's style is of our time by reason of a certain anxiety and a certain carefulness of expression which sets its seal upon it; it is, after all, an individual style, resembling the man. M. Cousin's style, at first approach, appears to escape the common law; one might really think that it is a person of the seventeenth century who is writing. He enters into his subject *de haute-lice*; he has an easy, natural elevation of tone, a full turn of thought, luminous and simple propriety of expression. However a certain air of pomp spread over the whole betrays to my eyes the taste of the Louis XIII period, extending to that of the age of Louis XIV at its height. His style too is less individual than the other's, and confines less closely the recesses of his thought; it is a style which is an honour to the present time rather than characteristic of it. I will not prolong beyond measure a parallel which may be summed up in a word: M. Villemain has more delicate tints, M. Cousin a broader touch. Only if anybody, struck by the many great parts in the latter which transport, were tempted to prefer him of the two as a

writer and to tell him so, we are very sure that he himself would be the first to refer his admirer back to the style of the other, and say: 'Look again, you have not seen all'.

MADAME RÉCAMIER

Monday, November 26, 1849.

In May last there vanished a unique figure among the women who have reigned by their beauty and grace; a salon was closed which had long united, under a charming influence, the most illustrious and most divers personages, into which even the most obscure had a chance of entering some time or other. The foremost in renown, in this group of memorable names, have been struck down by death, almost at the same time as she who formed its chief attraction and bond of union. A few hardly survive, now dispersed and disconsolate; and those who for a moment only passed through this *élite* of society have the right and almost the duty of speaking of her as of something which henceforth interests everybody and has become history.

Mme. Récamier's salon, though it was much besides, was, especially during recent years, a literary centre and focus. This kind of social creation, which had so much influence in France and exercised so real a sway (Mme. Récamier's salon is itself a proof of this) does not date back earlier than the seventeenth century. It is in the celebrated Hôtel de Rambouillet that one is agreed to place the origin of polite society, of that society where men and women gathered together to talk among themselves of beautiful things, and of those of the intellect in particular. But the solemnity of that Rambouillet circle accords little with the idea I would like to call up at this moment, and I should rather seek in more modest and secluded nooks of the world the true *precedents* of this kind of salon, the last of which has just ended before our eyes. About the middle of the seventeenth century, at the top of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, in the out-

skirts of the monastery of Port-Royal, there lived in retirement from the world a lady celebrated for her wit and the protracted splendour of her successes, the Marquise de Sablé. In this semi-retreat, which had a window looking upon the convent and a door still half opened to the world, this old friend of M. de La Rochefoucauld, still active in thought and taking an interest in everything, continued to assemble around her, till 1678, the year of her death, the most distinguished and varied names, of old friends remained faithful, who came from some distance, from town or from Court, to visit her, semi-recluses, people of the world like herself, whose mind had only become beautified and sharpened in retreat, recluses by profession, whom she snatched for a few moments, by dint of gracious persistence, from their vow of silence. These recluses, when their names were Arnauld or Nicole, cannot indeed have been very disagreeable, and Pascal must on one or two occasions have been of the number. This little salon of Mme. de Sablé, so exclusive, so frequented, which under the shadow of the cloister, though not too much under its influence, combined some of the advantages of the two worlds, appears to me to be the original type of what the salon of the Abbaye-aux-Bois was in our days.[1] I shall here speak of the latter only.

M. de Chateaubriand reigned there, and, when he was present, everybody deferred to him ; but he was not always there, and even then there were places, degrees, *asides* for each. They talked of everything, but confidentially, as it were, and not so loudly as elsewhere. All the world, or at least a good part of the world, went to this salon, in which there was nothing banal ; on entering one breathed an air of reserve and mystery. A friendliness, but a friendliness which was really felt and varied with each, a something indefinable addressed to each individually, put the guest at his ease at once, and

[1] Since writing the above I have had the satisfaction of finding this view confirmed in M. Cousin's book on *Madame de Sablé*, 1854, end of chap. i. p. 63 : ' . . . She had, he says of Mme. de Sablé, reason, a wide experience, an exquisite tact, an agreeable humour. When I picture her to myself, as I conceive her from her writings, her letters, her life, her friendships, half in solitary retreat, half in the outer world, with no fortune but very influential, an erstwhile pretty woman half retired into a convent and become a literary power, I think I can see, in our own days, Mme. Récamier at the Abbaye-aux-Bois'.

modified the first effect of an initiation into what very slightly suggested a sanctuary. One found there distinction and familiarity, or at least naturalness, a great facility in the choice of subjects, which is very important for the play of conversation, a readiness to enter into the spirit of what was said, which was not solely the effect of politeness and good grace, but testified to a truer interest. A look was at once met by a smile, which said so well: *I understand*, and which lighted all up with sympathy. Even the first time one did not leave without being touched in a particular spot of the mind and heart, which made one feel flattered and above all grateful. There were many distinguished salons in the eighteenth century—those of Mme. Geoffrin, of Mme. d'Houdetot, of Mme. Suard. Mme. Récamier knew them all and spoke very well of them; any one who wished to write about them with taste would have done well to have first talked with her about them; but none can have been like hers.

The reason is that she was like nobody. M. de Chateaubriand was the pride of this salon, but she was the soul of it, and she it is I must try to exhibit to those who did not know her; for to try to recall her to the others is superfluous, and to paint her impossible. I have no intention here of attempting her biography; a woman should never have a biography, an ugly word for the use of men, smacking of study and research. Even when they have nothing essential to conceal, women can only lose in charm in the text of a continuous narrative. Can a woman's life be told? It is felt, it passes, it appears. I should even be inclined to mention no date whatever, for dates in such a subject are not elegant. We will merely mention, since it must be, that Jeanne-Françoise-Julie-Adelaïde Bernard was born at Lyons, in that home of Louise Labé, on December 3, 1777. Of all these baptismal names that I have enumerated, the only one she was in the habit of using was *Julie* transformed into *Juliette*, although there was destined never to be a Romeo. She was married at Paris in her sixteenth year (April 24, 1793) to Jacques-Rose Récamier, a rich banker or who soon became one. At the beginning of the Consulate we see her brilliant, fêted, applauded, the youngest queen of elegance, giving the tone to fashion, inventing with

art simple things which only went with supreme beauty. We who were not present can only speak with extreme reserve of the mythological epoch, so to say, of Mme. Récamier, in which she appears to us at a distance like a young goddess on the clouds; we cannot speak of her fittingly, not because there is anything to conceal behind the cloud, but because such a tender and budding beauty possessed some of those delicate shades which cannot be rendered unless one has at least seen them. Who would think of trying to paint the dawn, if he had never seen the sun except at its setting? Still, as one cannot well understand the character and the charming genius of Mme. Récamier, that ambition of the heart which in her showed so much power and persistence under its delicacy; as one cannot well grasp, we say, her mind and her whole person without having a very clear opinion with regard to that which inspired it at the time, and which did not differ so much from that which inspired it to the end, I will try to touch cursorily upon some of the real traits which show through legend, which for her as for all beings gifted with fairy magic already covers the truth. When one wishes to judge Mme. de Sévigné or Mme. de Maintenon and account for their nature, one is obliged to have a general idea and a *theory* about them. To rightly understand, for example, Mme. de Maintenon's relations to Louis XIV or Mme. de Sévigné's to her daughter, and what kind of sentiment or passion they brought to each of them, it becomes necessary to ask oneself several questions about the youth of these two women, or more simply a single question, the first and almost the only question one has always to ask oneself when speaking of a woman: Has she loved? and how did she love?

I will put the question, therefore, or rather it puts itself, in spite of me, for Mme. Récamier; and for her as for Mme. de Maintenon, as for Mme. de Sévigné (Mme. de Sévigné before she was a mother), I will answer boldly: *No*. No, she never loved, loved with passion and fire; but that immense need to love which every tender soul bears within it changed in her case into an infinite necessity to please, or better to be loved, and into an active will, a fervent desire to pay for it all with kindness. We who saw her in her last years, and who caught in their flight some rays of that divine goodness, we know whether

she had enough to satisfy her demands, and whether friendship did not in the end absorb some of that fire that love had never had.

We must note two very distinct epochs in the life of Mme. Récamier: the days of her youth, her triumph and beauty, her long sunny morning which lasted very late till the setting; then the evening of her life after the sun had set, I can never make up my mind to call it her old age. In these two epochs so distinct in colour she was essentially the same, but she must have appeared very different. She was the same through two essential features which alone explain her, in that, in her youth, in the very vortex of excitement, she remained ever pure; in that, withdrawn into the shade and repose, she still preserved her desire to conquer and her sweet skill in winning hearts, let us say the word, her coquetry; but (the orthodox doctors must pardon the expression) it was an angelic coquetry.

There are natures which are born pure and which have received *all the same* the gift of innocence. Like Arethusa they traverse the salt sea; they resist the fire, like the children in the Scriptures who were saved by their good angel, and even refreshed with a sweet dew in the furnace. Mme. Récamier, in her youth, had need of this angel at her side and within her, for the world which she traversed and where she lived was very mixed and very fiery, and she was not on her guard against tempting it. To be true, I must lower my tone a little, and come down for a moment from that ideal height of Laura and Beatrice where one has been accustomed to place her, speak of her in short more familiarly and in prose. In the end she will not, I hope, lose by it.

At the moment when she appears in her splendour under the Consulate we see her immediately surrounded, admired and passionately loved. Lucien, the Consul's brother, is the first historical person who loves her (for I cannot count Barrère who had once known her as a child). Lucien loves her, is not repelled, will never be received. There is the shade of difference. It was the same with all those who urged their suit at that time, as with all who followed after. I recently saw, in the palace of the late King of Holland, at the Hague, a very beautiful statue of Eve. Eve, in the first bloom of youth,

faces the serpent who shows her the apple . she looks at it, she half turns to Adam, and appears to be consulting him. Eve is in that extreme moment of innocence when one plays with danger, when one talks about it in a whisper with oneself, or with another. Well ! this moment of indecision, which in the case of Eve did not endure and ended unfortunately, often recurred, and was protracted, and returned a thousand times in the brilliant and sometimes unwary youth we are speaking of ; but it was always checked in time, and dominated by a stronger feeling, by I know not what secret virtue. This young woman, face to face with those passions she knew not of, had moments of imprudence, of confidence, of curiosity, almost of a child or a boarding-school girl. She confronted peril smiling, with assurance, with charity, a little like those most Christian kings of the olden time, who, on a day in Holy Week, visited certain maladies to cure them. She did not doubt her success, her sweet magic, her virtue. She was almost anxious to wound your heart at first, in order afterwards to have the pleasure of miraculously curing you. When one complained or became angry, she would say with a despairing clemency : ' Come, and I will cure you . And she succeeded with some, with the greater part. All her friends, with very few exceptions, began by loving her with passion. She had many friends, and she kept nearly all. M. de Montlosier told her one day that she could say, with the Cid : *Five hundred of my friends.* She was truly a magician in imperceptibly converting love into friendship, whilst leaving to the latter all the bloom, all the perfume, of the first sentiment. She would have liked to arrest everything in *April.* Her heart had remained there, in that early spring, when the orchard is covered with white blossoms without any leaves.

I might here relate many things from memory, if my pen knew how to be light enough to touch these flowers without withering them. To her new friends (as she was sometimes willing to call them) Mme. Récamier often and readily spoke of the years that were gone and the persons she had known. ' It is a way, she said, of placing the past before friendship '.

Her intimacy with Mme. de Staël, with Mme. Moreau, with the wounded and vanquished, soon threw her to the

side of the opposition to the Empire; but there was a moment when she had not as yet adopted any colours. Fouché, seeing this young power, had the idea of making a tool of her. He wanted Mme. Récamier, at the beginning, to enter the Imperial household as a dame of honour; he did not love the nobility, and would have liked to have some influential and devoted person at court. She would not lend herself to such a part. She was soon in the opposition, especially through her friends and through the idea one formed of her.

One day before that time she was dining with one of Bonaparte's sisters. They wanted her to meet the first Consul; and he was there. At table it was arranged that she should be placed at his side; but, through some blunder at the moment of sitting down, she found herself next to Cambacérès, and Bonaparte said in jest to the latter: 'Eh bien! Consul Cambacérès, always next to the prettiest!'

Mme. Récamier's father, M. Bernard, had a place in the Post Office and was a Royalist; he was compromised under the Consulate, arrested, and placed in close confinement. She heard of this suddenly when she had dining with her Mme. Bacciochi, Bonaparte's sister. The latter promised to do everything to interest the Consul. After dinner Mme. Récamier went out and tried to see Fouché, who refused to receive her, 'for fear of being moved, he said, and that in an affair of State'. She hastened to the Théâtre-Français to rejoin Mme. Bacciochi, who was with her sister Pauline, whose attention was wholly occupied by Lafon's helmet. 'Just look, she said, how badly that helmet is put on; it is all on one side!' Mme. Récamier was on the rack; Mme. Bacciochi wanted to stay till the end of the tragedy, perhaps for her sister Pauline's sake. Bernadotte was in the box; he saw Mme. Récamier's perturbed air; he offered to take her out and to see the Consul at once himself. From this moment dates Bernadotte's warm feeling for her; he did not know her before. He obtained the father's pardon. What is said on this subject in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* is incorrect. Mme. Récamier did not see Bonaparte on this occasion; it was Bernadotte who undertook the whole affair.

Bernadotte loved her, then, and was one of her knights.

The Montmorencys, returned from the emigration, were not less so. Mathieu de Montmorency, who since then became a saint, Adrien (afterwards Duc de Laval), much later Adrien's son, who thus became his father's rival, all loved her passionately. Henri de Laval often encountered his father, the Duc de Laval, at her house; he held his own and did not quit the scene, which enraged the good Duke, and, as he was a man of some wit, he wrote to Mme. Récamier in the pleasantest manner possible: 'My son is himself in love with you, you know that I am; that is, by the way, the lot of the Montmorencys—

Ils ne mouraient pas tous, mais tous étaient frappés'.

Mme. Récamier was the first to tell these things, and she merrily laughed at them. She preserved almost to the end that childlike laugh, that youthful movement of putting her handkerchief to her mouth as if to keep from bursting out. But in her youth this childishness in feeling, with the graceful intrigue which mingled with it, more than once (can we be surprised at it?) led to serious complications. All these attracted and enamoured men were not so easy to drive and elude as that pacified dynasty of the Montmorencys. There must have been around her at certain hours many scenes of violence and revolt which this soft hand afterwards had pains to smooth down. In playing with these human passions which she only wished to charm and which she exasperated more than she thought, she was like the youngest of the Graces, of whom it is told that she amused herself by harnessing lions and teasing them. Unwary as innocence, as I have remarked, she loved peril, the peril of others if not her own; and why should I not say so? in this hazardous and too often cruel sport she disturbed, though so kind, many hearts; she involuntarily wounded some, not only of men in revolt and embittered, but of poor rivals, sacrificed without her knowledge and galled. That is a serious side which her final charity did not entirely fail to understand; it is a lesson which the supreme gravity which clings to her noble memory does not forbid one's recalling. With her instinct for purity and celestial goodness she indeed felt it herself; hence, admired and adored as she had been, she was never known to sigh

over her youth, nor her sunny mornings, nor her tempests, even the most embellished. She conceived no perfect happiness apart from duty; she placed the ideal of romance where she had so little met with it, in marriage; and it happened more than once in her fairest days, in the middle of a fête of which she was queen, that, stealing away from homage, she said, she would go out for a moment to weep.

Such I imagine her in society and in the vortex before her retreat. A series of chapters might be written about her which I cannot even outline. One of these chapters might treat of her relations and intimacy with Mme de Staël, two brilliant influences so distinct, very often crossed, hardly ever rivals, who so well supplemented each other. It was in 1807, at Mme. de Staël's château of Coppet, that Mme. Récamier met Prince Augustus of Prussia, one of the vanquished of Jena; she in her turn soon vanquished and conquered him, a royal prisoner, by habit rather brusque and at times a little embarrassing. This brusquerie even betrayed him. One day when he wished to say a few words to Mme. Récamier during a ride, he turned to Benjamin Constant who was of the party: 'Monsieur de Constant, he said, supposing you galloped on a little?' And the latter laughed at this piece of German delicacy.

Another chapter might treat of the easy conquest which Mme. Récamier made at Lyons of the gentle Ballanche, who yielded to her the first day without ever even telling her. Another chapter would tell of her relations, less simple, less easy at first, but in the end so firmly established, with M. de Chateaubriand. Mme. Récamier saw him for the first time at Mme. de Staël's in 1801; she saw him again a second time in 1816 or 1817 at the same place, about the time of Mme. de Staël's death. But these were only meetings, and the real intimacy only began late, at the time when M. de Chateaubriand left the ministry, and at the Abbaye-aux-Bois.

A chapter might also be written on her close intimacy with Benjamin Constant, which only dates from 1814–15. The letters of the latter to Mme. Récamier would be a great assistance; but they would be very inadequate from the point of view of the truth unless one added the counterpart, what he wrote for himself, when it was over,

and which many people have read, and unless the whole were illuminated by the moralist's reflexions which are not ordinarily found in the pleadings of an advocate. But this reminds me that there is quite an unpleasant lawsuit begun on the subject, and I hasten to hold my tongue.

Before the chapter on Benjamin Constant one might be written on the journey to Italy in 1813, the visit to Rome, the intimacy with Canova, the latter's marble bust, for which, in order to be ideal, he only needed to copy the model; then the visit to Queen Caroline and Murat at Naples. The latter, if I am not mistaken, was a little touched. But enough of rapid views.

When M. Récamier saw the hour approach when beauty pales and wanes, she did what very few women are able to do: she did not struggle; she accepted with good taste the first ravages of time. She understood that after such triumphs of beauty, the last means of still appearing beautiful was to lay no more claims to beauty. To a lady who saw her again after an interval of years, and was complimenting her on her face, she replied: 'Ah! my dear friend, the time for illusions is past. On the day that I saw that the little Savoyards in the street did not look round any more, I knew that all was over'. She spoke the truth. She was sensible indeed to every look and every praise, to the exclamation of a child or a woman of the people as to the declaration of a prince. In the crowds she passed through, seated in her elegant carriage which drove slowly, she acknowledged the admiration of each by a bow and a smile.

At two epochs M. Récamier suffered great reverses of fortune: the first time at the beginning of the empire, the second time in the first years of the Restoration. Then it was that she retired into apartments in the Abbaye-aux-Bois in 1819. She never took a greater place in the world than when she was in this modest retreat, at one extremity of Paris. From there her sweet genius, freed from complications too violent, made itself more and more beneficently felt. It may be said that she perfected the art of friendship, and caused it to make new progress; it was like another fine art that she introduced into life, and which embellished, ennobled and distributed everything around her. Party spirit at that time ran very high. She disarmed anger; she softened

asperities; she stripped off your rudeness and inoculated you with tolerance. She never rested until she had brought together in her house her friends of opposite sets, until she reconciled them by a gentle mediation. By such influence does society become society as far as possible, and acquire all its affability and grace. Thus does a woman, without leaving her sphere, do the work of civilization in the highest degree, thus Eurydice fulfils in her own manner the part of Orpheus. The latter tamed savage life; the other terminates and crowns civilized life.

One day in 1802, during that short peace of Amiens, not in the splendid hôtel of the Rue du Mont-Blanc, which Mme. Récamier then occupied, but in the drawing-room of the Château of Clichy where she spent the summer, some men had gathered together from many different sides—Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, General Moreau, Englishmen of distinction, Mr. Fox, Mr. Erskine and many others; they were face to face and observed each other like contending armies; nobody appeared inclined to make advances. M. de Narbonne, who was present, tried to engage in conversation, and was unable to succeed, in spite of his wit. Mme. Récamier entered: she spoke first with Mr. Fox, she said a word to each, she introduced each to the other with appropriate words of praise; and immediately the conversation became general, the natural bond of union was found.

What she did on that day, she did every day. In her little drawing-room at the Abbaye she thought of all, she spread far and wide her net of sympathy. There was not a man of talent, of virtue, of distinction whom she did not love to know, to invite, to oblige, to bring into notice, and into communication and harmony with those around her, stamping his heart with a little mark all her own. Here was ambition no doubt; but what an adorable ambition, especially when, whilst addressing the most celebrated, she does not forget even the obscurest, and when she seeks out the most bashful! It was the character of this so multiplied soul of Mme. Récamier to be at once universal and very particular, to exclude nothing, nay, to attract all, and yet to exercise choice.

This choice might even appear unique. During the

last twenty years M. de Chateaubriand was the great centre of her world, the great interest of her life, to whom I will not say that she sacrificed all others (she sacrificed nobody but herself), but that she subordinated all. He had his antipathies, his aversions, and even his bitterness, which his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* proclaim loudly enough to-day. She tempered and corrected all that. What ingenuity she exercised to make him speak when he was silent, to attribute to him amiable and kindly words, which he may no doubt have spoken shortly before in intimacy, but which he did not always repeat before witnesses! How coquettish she was for his glory! How well she sometimes succeeded in making him really lively, pleasant, quite happy, eloquent, everything that he could so easily be when he wished! She verified indeed by her gentle influence over him the saying of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: 'There is in woman a light gaiety which drives away man's melancholy'. And what a melancholy she had to deal with here! a melancholy which René had inherited from his mother's womb, and which increased with old age! Never did Mme. de Maintenon exercise so much ingenuity to amuse Louis XIV as Mme. Récamier did for M. de Chateaubriand. 'I have always remarked, said Boileau, returning from Versailles, that, when the conversation did not turn around his praises, the King was at once bored, and was ready to yawn or to retire'. Every great poet in his old age is in this respect a bit of a Louis XIV. Every day she had a thousand graceful inventions to renew and refresh his praises. She whipped up new friends, new admirers, from all sides. She chained us all to the feet of his statue with a gold chain.

A person with a wit as refined as it was just, and who knew her well, said of Mme. Récamier: 'She has in her character what Shakespeare calls the *milk of human kindness*, a tender and compassionate sweetness. She sees the faults of her friends, but she nurses them as she would nurse their physical infirmities'. She was the Sister of Mercy of their troubles, of their weaknesses, and a little of their faults.

That this habitual behaviour had in the long run its drawbacks, though mingled with a great charm; that in this warm and soothing atmosphere, whilst imparting softness

and polish to the minds of her guests, she enervated them a little and inclined them to self-complacency, I will not venture to deny, the more so because I think I myself experienced it. It was certainly a salon where not only politeness, but charity was a little prejudicial to the truth. There were decidedly things which she did not wish to see, which did not exist for her. She did not believe in evil. In her obstinate innocence, I would like to make the reader understand, she had preserved some of her childishness. Must we regret it? After all, will there be another place in life where we shall find a kindliness so real in the midst of an illusion so graced and beautiful? A bitter moralist, La Rochefoucauld, has said: 'We should have little pleasure if we never flattered ourselves'.

I have heard people ask if Mme. Récamier was intellectual. But it seems to me that we know it already. She possessed in the highest degree, not that wit which thinks of shining on its own account, but that which feels and brings out others'. She wrote little; she had early adopted the habit of writing as little as possible; but that little was good and of a perfect turn. In talking she also expressed herself clearly and correctly and to the point. In her souvenirs she chose by preference some delicate trait, a pleasant or gay anecdote, a piquant situation, and neglected the rest; she remembered with taste.

She was a charming listener, missing nothing good in what you said, without showing that she perceived it. She questioned with interest, and was all attention to the answer. Even her smile and silence were flattering, and made one wish her to be intellectual when leaving her.

As for the youth, the beauty of her heart, if it was given to all to appreciate it, it is the duty of those especially who benefited by it most nearly to speak of it some day. After the death of M. Ballanche and M. de Chateaubriand, though she still had M. Ampère, the Duc de Noailles, and so many other affections around her, she only languished and gradually approached her end. She expired on May 11, 1849, in her seventy-second year. This unique lady, whose memory will live as long as French society, was portrayed with much grace by Gérard

in the freshness of her youth. Her bust was carved by Canova in its ideal of beauty. On the day of her death Achille Deveria drew a faithful sketch of her which expresses suffering and repose.

HISTORY OF THE EMPIRE [1]

Monday, December 3, 1849.

M. THIERS has entered upon the second half of his History, that in which the faults and the first reverses of his hero begin to manifest themselves. His method of exposition, so developed and so luminous, does not conceal from us any of the errors and their consequences; he deals with them as he had previously dealt with the happy parts, and leaves nothing in obscurity. This method is such, from the details of the evidence, from the nature and abundance of the documents, that it allows the reader to form his own opinion, which may, on certain points, differ even from the historian's and contradict it, or at least check it. In a word, information so ample, drawn from such direct sources, served up in a language so lucid and so foreign to deception, constitutes, in the historian who is dealing with a contemporary subject, the rarest as well as the surest of impartialities.

Napoleon is certainly one of the foremost in power and in quality in the foremost rank of men. It was, I think, Machiavelli who said: 'Those men who, by means of laws and institutions, have formed republics and kingdoms, are placed highest, are most praised after the gods'. Napoleon is one of those mortals who, by reason of the greatness of the things they conceive and in part execute, might easily take their place in primitive imagination by the side of the gods. Yet, to judge him aright and as he was in reality, and confining myself to an attentive reading of this same history of M. Thiers, it seems to me that there entered essentially into the genius and the character of the man something titanic, which, in

[1] *History of the Consulate and the Empire.* By M. Thiers, vol. ix.

every circumstance, tended almost immediately to emerge, and which sooner or later was bound to bring about the catastrophe. This element of the titanic which, in him, might sometimes be confounded with the element of greatness, was of a nature also to compromise and to corrupt him. When he proclaimed himself to the world, society in distress was calling upon a saviour, civilization, exhausted by frightful struggles, was at one of those crises when that savage nature, which it always bears in its bosom, audaciously rises up and appears ready to crush it. It is then that in presence of this menacing savagery, the public cry goes up to a hero, to one of those powerful and rare men who thoroughly understand the nature of things, and who, just as in former times they would have assembled wandering tribes, to-day rally the enervated and demoralized classes, gather them once more into a sheaf, and reinvent, to tell the truth, society, hiding anew its basis, and covering it with an altar. Napoleon was one of those men; but in him, that legislator who was thought to have some sort of sacredness, that saviour strong enough in head and arm to lay hold of a society tottering on the brink of an abyss, and to set it up again on its foundations, had not at the same time the necessary temperament to keep it there. A legislator doubled with a great captain (a very necessary combination at that time) but also complicated with a conqueror, he loved before everything his first art, the art of war; he loved its excitement, its risk and its play. His genius constantly thought itself entitled to expect miracles, and, as they say, to put the bargain into Fortune's hands. At Napoleon's first appearance upon the scene, I perceive in him that excessive character, which has contributed definitively to increase his figure in men's imagination, but which, in the present, was destined some day or another to bring on disaster. After the admirable Italian campaign of 1796, did we not have the Egyptian adventure, which I call by that name because the chances were many against his returning from it? After the reasonable wonder caused by the establishment of the Consulate, the titanic appears and emerges almost at once; we find it again in that expedition to England, which also had so many chances of being a venture; for it was

certainly possible that, though he should have succeeded in landing, his fleet would have been shortly after de stroyed by Nelson, and that he would have had his Trafalgar on the morrow of the invasion, just as he had had his Aboukir on the morrow of his arrival in Egypt. Admiral Villeneuve was quite capable of being beaten a year sooner. Just imagine what would have been, in a half-conquered England, the situation of a French army, victorious but cut off from its empire by a sea and a fleet that was mistress of the seas! I know that no man would ever dare anything great and would never do immortal deeds if he did not at some time risk all for all; so it is not the fact of his having risked once or twice, but his disposition and inclination to risk always, that I here emphasize in Napoleon. Nothing can equal for beauty, as a majestic and beneficent creation of genius, the peaceful work of the Consulate, the Civil Code, the Concordat, the home administration organized in all its branches, the restoration of power in all orders; it is a cosmos reborn out of chaos. But, even in civil affairs, the titanic soon reappears at the foundation of the Empire; I see it surging in that improvised scaffolding of a throne à la Charlemagne, in that exaggerated and ruinous machine of an Empire flanked on all sides by family kingships. There again emerges what one may call, in such a matter, adventure. But it was above all in the terrible game of battles that this extraordinary genius went in quest of it, and that time after time he staked the magnificent results obtained. This captain, the greatest perhaps that ever existed, loved his art too much to renounce it readily. That unparalleled activity never had its full employment and its full enjoyment, was never really in its element except when it was starting upon a fresh campaign. His secret passion exercised its ingenuity in furnishing the rare good sense, with which he was endowed, with pretexts, with semblances of national and political reasons, for its continual relapses. After the miracles of Austerlitz and Jena, do we not see him challenging Fortune, and trying by every means to make her yield more than she can give? There comes a moment when the nature of things rises in revolt and makes genius itself pay dearly for its abuses of power and good fortune. That was apparent at

Eylau; and from the height of that blood-soaked graveyard, under that brazen climate, Napoleon, warned for the first time, may have had a sort of vision of the future. The future disaster in Russia was there, before his eyes, in miniature, in a prophetic vista.

For a moment he seemed to comprehend it, and, at the sight of those smoking fires seen across the snow, of those corpses lying upon the icy plain, he exclaimed: 'This sight is calculated to inspire princes with a love of peace and a horror of war'. But the impression, sincere perhaps for the duration of a minute, passed away quickly, and the familiar demon resumed possession of his soul. After Tilsitt, he was at the apogee of his greatness; the continent, crushed, did not stir; the Emperor of Russia, subjugated and as if under a spell, entered spontaneously within the charmed circle of the victor. I know of no sight more philosophical, more pregnant with reflexions of every kind, than that of these two men sitting for hours with their elbows upon a table, a map spread out under their eyes, and dividing the world between them. It would require a Tacitus or a Shakespeare to vividly describe what such a sight suggests to many hearts, what I at least feel for my part, and what many others vaguely feel like myself. Genius is great, but the universe is also great; and I can only repeat that there is a moment when the nature of things (including the conscience of nations), too unheeded, rises up and takes its revenge, when the universe, which one tried to strangle, resumes the upper hand.

It was at the other extremity of the continent, it was in Spain that the first crack was heard, that one suddenly became aware that the colossal statue had a foot of clay. In his eighth volume M. Thiers has related, with the most minute and dramatic details, all the phases and vicissitudes of that enterprise (let us use the word as he does himself), of that outrage committed by Napoleon against the Spanish royalty. Profiting by the forced peace of Europe, assured of Russia's alliance and certain of buying the connivance of the Western world with a bait in the direction of Turkey, Napoleon at one time conceives the idea of laying hands on the Spanish throne, of hurling from it an imbecile king, a dissolute queen, and of disinheriting their son, who was not really much better,

but who could not at that time be reproached with any crime except inability to live on good terms with his wretched parents and their scandalous favourite, the Prince of the Peace. M. Thiers, in possession of confidential documents of which none but he had hitherto had any knowledge, and applying to them his wonderful power of elucidation, has endeavoured to determine with the utmost precision the moment when this plan of fatal usurpation entered Napoleon's head and assumed the character of a fixed resolution; for the vague idea of it must have long before crossed his thought. It is not scruples of ordinary justice that generally arrest men of the capacity of Frederick and Napoleon, whether it be Silesia or Spain that is in question. The important thing, for this race of unique mortals, is to choose the right moment, to rightly measure their audacity, and to assert besides in a certain just proportion the lion's right. Frederick calculated correctly for Silesia; Napoleon presumed too much in the case of Spain. M. Thiers has arrived, on this point of the Spanish enterprise studied in its origin, at a result that is most curious and most satisfying for history as well as for morality. We see Napoleon hesitating till the last moment, changing his mind, disclosing his whole intention to nobody, only lifting up corners of the truth for his most intimate agents, desiring to be enlightened and seeming to fear it at the same time. His rare good sense, if not his instinct of justice, told him that that was perhaps the biggest affair he had entered upon since the 18 Brumaire. But on the 18 Brumaire he had a whole nation of accomplices to back him: here he was going to have before him a whole nation of opponents, and, for judge, the conscience of the human race rising up in indignation. Fatality and appetite too carried him on. The trap he set at Bayonne succeeded to a nicety just as he had resolved; the old King and his son, astutely led into the snare, remained there. But the nation also remained behind them, and at this sudden news, through a sort of electric commotion, the whole of Spain rose up.

M. Thiers' ninth volume is devoted to retracing the first and already terrible consequences of the Bayonne outrage. This volume is composed of three books, entitled *Baylen*, *Erfurt* and *Somo-Sierra*. In the book

on *Baylen*, we follow from beginning to end the Spanish rising, the atrocious cruelties of the populace mingling with the energy of patriotism, which so easily sully it in any country. These disgraceful scenes which he stigmatises do not prevent M. Thiers from rendering full justice to the generous feeling which carried away Spain at this time—

'I am not, he says, and I never shall be a flatterer of the multitude. I have vowed, on the contrary, to defy its tyrannical power, for I have suffered the infliction of living in times when it dominates and disturbs the world. Yet I will do it justice : if it does not see, it feels, and, on the very rare occasions when it is necessary to close one's eyes and obey one's heart, it is not indeed a counsellor to listen to, but a stream to follow. The Spanish people, although in rejecting the royalty of Joseph they rejected a good prince and good institutions, were perhaps better inspired than the upper classes. They acted nobly in rejecting the good which came from a stranger's hand, and, without eyes, they saw more clearly than men of enlightenment, when they thought they could hold their own against a conqueror whom the most powerful armies and the greatest generals had been unable to withstand'.

The book on *Baylen* shows us the gropings and the first reverses of Napoleon's lieutenants, isolated in a hilly country, under a burning sun, in the heart of a hostile population ; first the crushing of the French fleet in the port of Cadiz, its forced surrender, and soon after the celebrated disaster which was the first and even the only affront of this kind that our valiant armies had to suffer, the capitulation in the open field, of General Dupont at Baylen. From this day, Fortune begins to turn ; she will still have brilliant returns, but the prestige is gone.

Upon this capital point of his history, as upon so many others, M. Thiers, in possession of unique documents, has brought to bear a light of evidence of which nobody before had any suspicion and which is definitive. General Dupont, one of the most brilliant officers of the grand army, the same who, in the campaign of 1805, at Haslach, had with sixty thousand men succeeded in defeating two hundred thousand Austrians, and whom Napoleon intended to make one of his next marshals ;

Dupont, speeding *like an arrow* into Andalusia in revolt, is soon obliged to humble himself and think of a retreat. But he thinks too late, and tarries too long motionless in an insecure position; he chooses badly the points in his rear, and does not closely enough guard the defiles of the Sierra-Morena, through which he must repass. He allows the enemy time to probe and feel the weak spot, *which the steel could enter*, being pushed. Lastly, in his slow progress, he is encumbered by his sick, poorly served by his young soldiers wasted by the heat of the climate, badly seconded above all by his lieutenants, by General Védel, who does there in a small way what Grouchy will one day do at Waterloo. In short, from one mistake to another, of which some are his, others his lieutenants', and the first of which is to be traced to Napoleon himself, he is brought to sign that humiliating capitulation with which his name has become associated. M. Thiers has narrated, discussed, and made plain this whole affair of Bayonne, in such a way as to leave no room for doubt about the true causes, to ascribe to each his faults, and to charge the memory of General Dupont only with those which are really his. A lofty sentiment of military morality animates these pages; we feel how much the historian suffers in having to recount this first disaster; but he has boldly sounded it, and he esteems himself still happy in having to verify, after so many calumnies, only one immense misfortune.

'The unfortunate General Dupont, he says of him at the time of the truce he has just obtained, till now so brilliant, so fortunate, returns to his tent, crushed by moral torments which make him almost insensible to the physical torments of two painful wounds. That is the way with Fortune in war as in politics, as everywhere in this agitated world, a changing scene, where good and evil fortune are linked together, succeed and efface each other, leaving behind, after a long series of contrary sensations, only emptiness and misery! Three years before, on the banks of the Danube, this same General Dupont, arriving breathlessly to the succour of Maréchal Mortier, saved him at Diernstein. But other times, other places, another spirit! That was in December and in the North; those were old soldiers, full of health and vigour, stirred up by a rigorous climate, instead of being oppressed by an enervating one, accustomed to all the vicissitudes of war, exalted by honour, never hesitating between death and surrender. Then, if their position

became doubtful for a moment, there was time to hasten to their assistance and save them! And then Fortune still smiled, and made up for all: nobody arrived too late, nobody made mistakes! Or indeed, if one committed a mistake, the other corrected it. Here, in this Spain, where they had made such an unfortunate entry, they were young, weak, sick, oppressed by the climate, new to suffering! They began by not being lucky, and, if one made a mistake, the other aggravated it. Dupont had come to the assistance of Mortier at Diernstein: Védel was not to come to Dupont's assistance until it was too late!'

We might no doubt, in some parts of the narrative, wish for a more animated brush, a deeper line of the burin; but I do not know if a different manner could produce as clear, lucid, and as perfectly just an impression as that left by this even, uniform narrative, and this style, the faithful and patient interpreter of justice. On hearing of this disaster of Dupont, Napoleon, who was then at Bordeaux, flew into a passion; in the first moment of anger, he spoke of having him shot, him and all the authors of the capitulation. Soon, on the remonstrances of the *wise and ever wise Cambacérès*, says M. Thiers, and the first transport having cooled down, he referred the judgment of this affair to a court of honour, composed of the grandees of the Empire. The sentence pronounced was degradation, and it was ordained by an imperial decree that three manuscript copies of the whole procedure should be deposited, one in the Senate, another at the War Depôt, the third in the Archives of the Imperial High Court. When in 1814 the Restoration, finding General Dupont in prison, made him Minister for War, the latter laboured at annihilating every trace of that painful process; but he was only able to destroy two copies, that in the Senate and that at the War Depôt. The third copy, which had been intended for the Imperial High Court (which was never organized), had remained in the possession of M. Regnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angely. It is this copy, now unique, which M. Thiers has seen, and which has enabled him to offer General Dupont the only rehabilitation possible, that which concerns his military honour. Thus the ill-fated General, without being aware of it, wanted to destroy the only proof which could put beyond question, if not his ability in

this disaster, at least his honour.[1] I have sometimes heard M. Thiers talk with great animation of this affair of General Dupont: he will pardon me for remembering his conversations, but those who hear him do not easily forget, and, shall I say it? his spoken words admirably supplement his style. In talking he dares to say many things which his scrupulous taste thinks it ought to refrain from in the History. I do not blame him, but I will take advantage of the two resources. 'Injustice, he one day said with energy, is a mother who is never barren, and bears children worthy of her'. And he cited Mortier, who, cruelly banished in 1804 for a wrong committed towards the Consul rather than towards France, returns in 1813 an ungrateful son. He cited Dupont, who, harshly punished for his disaster at Baylen, becomes a Minister in 1814, and then takes his revenge, and becomes really culpable.

The book entitled *Baylen* ends with the story of another regrettable capitulation, but about which there was nothing at least that was not honourable, that of Junot and his army in Portugal. The English troops had just landed in that country. This was as yet only a first attempt, a first stroke, and they had to return to the charge before obtaining a foothold in the Peninsula, from which they only issued by the French frontier. However the signal is given: Sir Arthur Wellesley, who was afterwards Duke of Wellington, with that good obstinate sense against which genius will break down, appears and shows his form for the first time. The qualities of the two armies, the military spirit of the two nations, are face to face, and M. Thiers has characterized them in one of those pages which he knows how to write on such a subject—

'It was, he says, speaking of Wellington's corps, very fine infantry, having all the qualities of the English army. This army, as is well known, is formed of men of every sort, voluntarily engaged in its ranks, serving their whole life or nearly so, subjected to a terrible discipline which flogs them to

1 The Countess Dupont, the General's widow, has tried to dispute the accuracy of these facts; Maréchal Dode, I know not why, has also tried. General Pelet, Director of the War Depôt, spontaneously intervened in this discussion to confirm the historian's assertions and our explanations. (See the *Constitutionnel* of January 7 and 11, 1850.)

death for the smallest faults; which of a good or bad subject makes a uniform and obedient subject, marching into danger with an invariable submission, led by officers full of honour and courage. The English soldier, well fed, well drilled, shooting with remarkable accuracy, proceeding slowly because he is little adapted for marching and lacks individual ardour, is solid, almost invincible in certain positions where the nature of the place seconds his resisting character, but becomes weak if he is forced to march, to attack, to overcome those difficulties which one surmounts with vivacity, audacity and enthusiasm. In a word, he is firm, he is not enterprising. Just as the French soldier, by his ardour, his energy, his promptitude, his disposition to brave everything, was the predestined instrument of Napoleon's genius, the slow and solid English soldier was made for the limited, but wise and resolute spirit of Sir Arthur Wellesley'.

A serious reflexion already suggests itself: which is, how much prudence and tenacity in the long run get the better of genius and of the strength which overtaxes itself. We will leave aside that which is the outcome of greatness of imagination and poetry: the great definitive political rôle will remain with the Pitts and the Wellingtons, those obstinate temporisers. I say Pitt, for if personally he fell in the attempt, it was his policy which triumphed in 1814 through his continuers and his disciples. One cannot say that Napoleon, with his genius had not all sorts of political ideas; but too often those ideas only flashed through his thought, and did not sojourn there with that fixity and that ascendency which befit real political ideas. That titanic something, as I have called it, carried him beyond. A genius so positive however in details, his ideal set up its goal outside of the possible. His last word, when he uttered it, proceeded perhaps as much and more from the poet than the politician. There was in this thought, even so firm, a certain height where dazzlement and dream commenced. So men, who are only in the second rank compared with him, have been able to push themselves and their country to fortunes more stable and to maintain themselves in their success. That is the advantage that men like Cromwell, William of Orange, and that combined genius of Pitt and Wellington, which finally vanquished him, have over him in history.

After the book on *Baylen* we have that entitled *Erfurt.*

Napoleon hears of the Spanish disaster at the end of the summer of 1808, and feels at the instant that he has much to repair. He has need, before all, of checking Europe, for the indignation of the vanquished begins to simmer, the movement of the nations is already finding utterance in a dull murmur, and the hour will soon approach, if he is not on his guard, when all Europe will be for him a Spain. This fatal hour is not yet come, but already more than one alarming symptom is announcing it to any who are willing to perceive it. Napoleon is preparing, then, at Erfurt, for September and October of that year, one of those grand political and theatrical performances which he understands so well, calculated to act on the minds of sovereigns and the imagination of peoples. He composes his brow and puts on a serene expression, a *solar* face, as they said of Louis XIV. He goes with the pleasantest smile (a more subtle smile than Louis XIV ever had) to meet his faithful ally, Alexander, still under the charm and fascination; he wants to buy of him, with some concession (the smallest possible) the freedom of his movements in Spain. During the long interviews of the two Emperors, the crowd of kings. sovereigns of the second order, princes and ambassadors, will act as supernumeraries on the front of the stage; hunting parties and fêtes will cover the seriousness of the game—

'Napoleon desired, says M. Thiers, that French Letters should contribute to the splendour of the reunion, and ordered the administration of the theatres to send to Erfurt the leading French actors, and the foremost of all, Talma, to perform there *Cinna, Andromaque, Mahomet, Œdipe.* He excluded comedy, although he valued the immortal words of Molière as they deserved; but, he said, they are not understood in Germany. We must show the Germans the beauty, the grandeur of our tragic drama; they are more capable of comprehending them than of penetrating the depth of Molière'.

That was no doubt a sufficient reason for excluding Molière; but was there not another reason besides? The fact is that the sort of people who are called Molière and Shakespeare say things from time to time which penetrate the whole man and unexpectedly unmask the human comedy. When one is oneself playing a part

and staging a serious and solemn play, it is not safe to admit those men to witness it. Classical tragedy, even Corneille's, has not quite the same effects.

One should read in M. Thiers the details of those conversations, those allurements of Erfurt. We witness the intimacy of two Emperors; we comprehend the greatness of the one, we share the fascination of the other; we may also have a presentiment that this fascination may have its term. The character of Alexander, amiable, impulsive, mystic, fond of the marvellous, and ready to cool down the moment the marvellous gives place to the positive, even the most profitable positive, this character is touched with much truth, and painted all the better for being here in activity. In a visit to Weimar, Napoleon sees the illustrious Goethe and is pleased to converse with him with an infinite charm—

'After a splendid repast says M. Thiers, a ball assembles the most brilliant German society; Goethe and Wieland are there. Napoleon left that society and went into the corner of a drawing-room to have a long conversation with the two celebrated German writers. He spoke with them of Christianity, of Tacitus, that historian who was the terror of tyrants, whose name he uttered without fear, he said with a smile; he maintained that Tacitus had a little overdrawn the gloomy picture of his time, and that as a painter he was not simple enough to be quite true. Then he passed on to modern literature, compared it with the ancient, showed himself always the same in the matter of art as in the matter of politics, an advocate of rule, or orderly beauty, and, speaking of the drama which imitates Shakespeare, which mixes up tragedy and comedy, the terrible and the burlesque, he said to Goethe: "I am astonished that a great mind like yours *does not love the distinct kinds*". A profound word that very few critics of our days are capable of comprehending'.

I myself belong a little to those critics, I confess to my shame, if there can be any disgrace in being of Goethe's opinion in criticism. Might I be allowed to say that Napoleon was there plying his trade of monarch, in waging war against Tacitus and Shakespeare? I am afraid that he did not give Goethe time to reply, or that the latter, like the ceremonious German that he was, was too respectful to the potentate to answer readily and freely. Napoleon had hardly given himself enough leisure to rightly understand that universal nature of

Goethe; he still saw in him the author of *Werther*, that is to say, what Goethe had been at one moment of his youth, and was no longer.

Tastes change, opinion has its flows and ebbs, even with respect to reputations already made. With regard to those words we have just read on Tacitus, I think it is true to remark that the eloquent historian whom Racine called *the greatest painter of antiquity*, the philosopher-historian, who was held in such high honour during the whole of the eighteenth century, has been in less favour for some time. I have known of some good minds who shared this idea of Napoleon, that Tacitus, in his pictures, *perhaps forced his colours a little*, that he was not *simple enough to be altogether true*. We are not to-day in a position to reply to such a conjecture; the only guarantee we have of Tacitus' fidelity is Tacitus himself. There is a certain degree of talent in the painter, which may no doubt tempt him sometimes to create his subject or to put a finish upon it. Saint-Simon, to take a modern example, by his power of catching life-like portraits of his originals, and making them stand out before our eyes, may have treated some of them unkindly and greatly exaggerated them. However, the general truth of such pictures is also its own proof, it is obvious, and, on seeing them, we justly exclaim as before a portrait of which we have never known the original: *How true, how like it is!* I will not certainly counsel anybody to imitate Tacitus, as we have seen several moderns do. Nothing but Tacitus, and above all Tacitus imitated, would be strained and very wearisome. However, in a historical narrative, a little Tacitus from time to time would be no harm, if we understand by it a strong, concentrated reflexion, a figured and profound expression which gathers an entire situation and judges it, one of those touches which enable us to see through a man, and characterize him for ever.

In repeating just now Napoleon's opinion of Tacitus, I should not be astonished if the eminent historian had given us a glimpse of his own. M. Thiers, by instinct and natural disposition, loves before all naturalness and simplicity, the opposite of the declamatory and all that resembles it and lends itself to it. In literature, Bossuet, Molière and Racine are his gods, and in that, he has

the religion of the greater number; but he has more than anybody his preferences and exclusions: he is a partisan of Racine almost against Corneille, of Voltaire decidedly against Jean-Jacques. A clear, strong and acute mind, by his long positive practice he has only fortified himself in his first instinct and added the judgment of experience. In history, his method would recall rather that of Polybius, among the ancients; war, administration, finances, he grasps all, he expounds all, as he has studied it with precision, continuity, and without allowing the smallest detail to escape him. In a history such as that he is dealing with to-day, where he is the first to tread, and with the incomparable materials he has had at his disposal, we should I think have wished him such a method, if he had not had it already. How much declamation and how many wrong views a history like this will arrest at the origin! How many questions he has judged and settled which might have furnished matter for controversy, if he had not at once found the decisive solution! I will not go so far as to say that that is the case on all points; there are branches of this Imperial history which he has not treated as fully as he might have done, diplomacy for example. But in respect of the civil order, of administration, of war he has carried exposition to the last degree of elucidation and evidence to which it could go. The public in general are rendering tribute and justice to this great historical composition and the fine qualities which are there displayed; but, in my opinion, they do not yet render it enough, and the future will have more to say about it. Everybody takes up and reads this history, but there is only one way of reading it as it should be read, in detail, with maps in front of us, without passing or hastening over anything; it is not one of those books of which one can gain an idea by skimming them. The general plan is vast and even grand; the historian proceeds by great masses which he disposes and distributes around a principal event which gives its name to each book. But, in the execution, he does not aim at grouping, he forces nothing, he obliges no fact to fit in more than it should. His narrative, calm and limpid, unfolds itself without impatience. Once the arches of the bridge are thrown across the river, he allows the stream to flow spontaneously

in all its breadth. In his style, the writer has nowhere flattered the taste of the time for effects and colours; and we might even think that he has sometimes taken too little account of it; but it is a very rare satisfaction for serious and judicious minds to read a set of volumes so easy and so full, which have issued entire from the heart of the subject and enable us to fully master it; of an almost familiar simplicity of tone, where we never meet with a difficulty in the thought, a jarring expression, and where we assist so commodiously at the spectacle of the greatest things.

The third book of this ninth volume is headed *Somo-Sierra*, but its true title ought to be *Saragossa*, from the name of that extraordinary siege which was one of those *triumphant defeats* that Montaigne speaks of. Reassured in the direction of the North, and feeling he had at least a few months before him in the direction of the Danube, Napoleon, with a mass of forces, marches upon Spain in November 1808 to avenge the affront of Baylen, and to reassert the ascendency of his arms. This book, which contains the operations in Spain up to February 1809, is quite military, and it is not I who am going to regret it. I sometimes hear people say that there are too many military details in M. Thiers' History. But do they forget that he is writing the history of the Empire, and that of the greatest captain of modern times? His task and his craft consist in enabling us to understand his hero as well as if we were of the profession, and he succeeds in doing so. By means of those movements of troops, those comings and goings of regiments and battalions, which he enumerates by their numbers, we obtain an unmistakable idea of the quite special *industry* with which Napoleon is able to draw from his armies in Germany and Italy, without weakening them too much, corps that he adapts to his new chess-board; seated in our armchair we follow the great military artist in his arts and devices as an organiser. Every attentive reader becomes for the time Prince Berthier. When publishing, twenty-five years ago, the volumes in which he gave us the history of the Convention, M. Thiers said: 'I did not fear entering into the details of loans, contributions, paper-money; I did not fear to mention the prices of bread, soap, candles; I shall re-

volt, weary, disgust many readers (he was exaggerating the inconvenience), but I thought it was worth while attempting to give the whole truth in history'. M. Thiers continues here to apply this same method with more width. We see Napoleon, at the time of his winter campaign in Spain, busying himself especially about two details in the matter of supply, the *footgear* and *cloaks* of his soldiers. Ah! who would not like to know exactly how Hannibal and Alexander solved these difficulties of military supply on a large scale? In this campaign, where he is animated by so many motives, Napoleon will be victorious at all points; but, for the first time, he does not succeed as he could have wished; the results only incompletely answer to the science expended upon the manœuvres. He tries to strike a great blow, and the only result is the brilliant fight of Somo-Sierra. For the expert fencer, it has been remarked, there is no more dangerous antagonist than a man who is ignorant of the art, especially if he is both furious and courageous. Napoleon had this experience in Spain. The enemy, by their want of consistency and their unforeseen acts, would not reply to the most cunning manœuvres, would not turn in the direction where the great opponent expected them. He wanted to annihilate these armies of insurrection, and he only succeeded in scattering them. Now, an army, even if routed, which disperses in a friendly country, has the means of quickly reforming into bands. This narrative of operations, almost always interesting to follow, in which General Gouvion-Saint-Cyr is dealt with in a special episode for his fine campaign in Catalonia, is intermingled with and relieved by some very lively pages on the royalty of Joseph and his entourage. We see Maréchal Jourdan quite up to the level of this King whose Berthier he is, Jourdan, wise, calm and mediocre, exclaiming from the depth of his heart, in a letter to General Belliard: 'Ah! my dear General, if you could help to get me out of the cursed galley in which I am, you would do me a great service! How happy I should be to go and plant my cabbages, though things must remain in their present state!' That is however what too much philosophy leads to when one carries on the trade of a hero. As to Joseph, he would not be so ready to give up his trade of king, and he is by no means of a

humour to go and *plant his cabbages*; he thinks himself very well qualified to rule, but he would like to do it in comfort, on a throne of his own, like a good King Louis XII under his canopy, as if he were heir to a long race. Napoleon, by means of vigorous letters, in which he concentrates the high maxims of his statesmanship, tries to wind up that easy-going and moderately royal soul of his brother and to inoculate him with what cannot be learned. This whole contrast between the brothers is touched by M. Thiers with much subtlety. We come at last to Saragossa, to that unique, terrible siege, which one is indeed forced to admire in spite of the horror, and which will remain the most famous example of patriotic resistance in face of a foreign invasion:—

'Nothing in modern history', says M. Thiers, had resembled this siege, and we should have to go back to two or three examples in antiquity, as Numantia, Saguntum or Jerusalem, to find the like scenes. Yet the horror of the modern event surpassed the horror of the ancient events by all the power of the means of destruction imagined by science. Such are the dire consequences of the conflict of great empires! Princes, nations go wrong, an ancient writer has said, and thousands of victims innocently perish for their errors'.

I think I recognize, in this word of an ancient, Horace's line—

Quidquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi,

which La Fontaine translated in his manner—

Hélas! on voit que de tout temps
Les petits ont pâti des sottises des grands.

But those who have lived in times of revolution know that it is not only kings and the great who make mistakes. Alfieri said after '93: 'I knew the great, and now I know the small'. To the faults of princes M. Thiers has therefore taken the liberty to add in his translation the errors of the people, and I much like this variant of Horace. Yet, at Saragossa, it was not the people who erred.

Such is in substance this ninth volume, which shows what the historian will be in the second part of the picture, and in what sense of generous impartiality he intends

to fulfil his task to the end. One is touched with a feeling of respect to see with what constancy of mind, in the atmosphere of political anxieties which surrounds him, M. Thiers, in the plenitude of his talent as a writer, without being turned aside from his aim, manages to pursue his work with regularity.

M. JOUBERT[1]

Monday, December 10, 1849.

SOMEBODY one day expressed astonishment that Geoffroy could repeatedly return to the charge and write so many articles on the same play. One of his witty colleagues, M. de Feletz, replied: 'Geoffroy has three ways of writing an article: saying, repeating, and contradicting himself (*dire, redire, et se contredire*)'. I have already spoken more than once of M. Joubert, and yet would speak of him again to-day without repeating and contradicting myself. The new edition which is being published at this moment will furnish me with the opportunity and perhaps the means.

The first time I spoke of M. Joubert, I had to reply to a question which one had a right to put to me: Who is M. Joubert? To-day this question will not again be asked. Though he is not one of those writers who are ever destined to become popular, the first publication of his two volumes of Thoughts and Letters, in 1842, sufficed to class him at once in the estimation of men of taste and judgment; my duty to-day is only to extend a little the circle of his readers.

His life was simple, and I only recall it here for the sake of those who like to know what sort of a man one is speaking of when dealing with an author. M. Joubert, who was born in 1754 and died in 1824, was in his lifetime as little of an author as it is possible to be. He was one of those happy spirits who pass their life in thinking and conversing with their friends, in dreaming in solitude, in meditating some great work they will never accomplish, and which only reaches us in fragments. These fragments, by their quality and in spite of a few

[1] *Thoughts, Essays, Maxims and Correspondence of M. Joubert* (2 vols.).

defects of a too subtle thought, are distinguished enough in this case for the author to deserve to live in future memory. M. Joubert was in his day the most refined and original type of that class of educated men, such as the pre-Revolutionary society alone produced, spectators, listeners without ambition, without envy, curious, idle, attentive, disinterested and taking an interest in everything, the true *amateur* of beautiful things. 'To converse and to know, in this above all consisted, according to Plato, the happiness of private life'. This class of connoisseurs and amateurs, so well qualified to enlighten talent and keep it in check, has almost vanished in France now that everybody has a profession. 'We should always have in our heads, said M. Joubert, an open and free corner, to find a place therein for the opinions of our friends, and to lodge them there provisionally. It really becomes intolerable to converse with men who have in their brains only compartments which are all taken up, and where nothing external can enter. Our hearts and minds should be hospitable'. But how vain nowadays to ask intellectual hospitality, to expect a welcome for your ideas, your budding thoughts, of busy and bustling minds, quite full of themselves, real torrents all roaring with their own thoughts! M. Joubert, in his youth, coming from his province of Périgord to Paris in 1778, at the age of twenty-four, found there what we no longer find; he lived there as one lived then: he chatted. What he did in those youthful days may be summed up in a single word. He talked, then, with renowned men of letters; he knew Marmontel, La Harpe, d'Alembert; above all he knew Diderot, the most accessible by nature and the most hospitable of minds. The influence of the latter upon him was great, greater than one might suppose, seeing the difference of results. Diderot certainly had in Joubert a strange pupil, a pupil chastened, who finally became a Platonist and a Christian, enamoured of the ideal beautiful and the holy, studying and adoring piety, chastity, modesty, finding no form ethereal enough, no expression luminous enough, for these noble themes. And yet it is only by this contact with Diderot that one can well explain in M. Joubert the birth, the inoculation of certain ideas so new, so bold at that time, which he

rendered more true by elevating and rectifying them. M. Joubert had his Diderot period, in which he essayed all; later he exercised choice. At all times, very early even, he had tact; taste only came later. 'Good judgment in literature he said, is a very slow faculty, which attains the last stage of its growth very late'. Arrived at this stage of maturity, M. Joubert rendered Diderot also the justice of saying that there are many more *extravagances of style* than *extravagances of ideas* in his works. It was especially in the matters of art and literature that he owed to Diderot his awakening and his initiation. But, falling upon a soul so light and delicate, these ideas of literary reform and regeneration in art which in Diderot had still something bourgeois and prosaic, something heady and declamatory, became chastened and purified, assumed the character of an ideal, which imperceptibly approximated them to Greek beauty: for M. Joubert was a Greek, an Athenian touched with the Socratic grace: 'It seems to me, he said, much more difficult to be a modern than an ancient'. He was above all an ancient in respect of his calm, moderate feeling; he did not believe in forcing effects, in emphasizing beyond measure. He demanded a pleasingness that was lively and gentle, a certain inner, perpetual joy, giving ease and flexibility to movement and form, to expression clearness, light and transparency. Therein he made beauty principally to consist.

'The Athenians were delicate of mind and ear. They would not have tolerated a word calculated to displease, even if merely quoted. We might say that they were always in good humour when they wrote. They disapproved in style of the austerity which proclaims difficult, harsh, gloomy or strict morals'.

He said again—

'Those proud Romans had a hard ear which had to be flattered for a long time to dispose it to listen to beautiful things. Hence that oratorical style that we find even in their wisest historians. The Greeks, on the contrary, were endowed with perfect organs, easy to play upon, which needed only to be reached in order to move them. So the simplest dress sufficed for an elegant thought to please them, and in description they were satisfied with the pure truth. Above all, they observed the maxim: *Nothing in excess*. Great choice and neatness in thoughts; words assorted and beautiful by their own harmony; in fine the

sobriety that was necessary in order that nothing might retard an impression, these form the character of their good literature'.

On Pigalle and modern sculpture as opposed to the ancient, on painting, we might cite thoughts of his of the same order, whole pages which show very clearly both wherein he proceeds from Diderot and wherein he parts company with him. Thus then, about the period of 1789, there was in France a man already mature, aged thirty-five years, eight years older than André Chénier, fourteen years older than Chateaubriand, who would have been quite prepared to understand, to unite them, to give them incitements and views, to make each of them able to extend and complete his horizon. This was the part in fact that M. Joubert played in respect of M. de Chateaubriand, whom he knew in 1800, immediately after the latter's return from London. M. de Chateaubriand, at this fine moment of his life (this fine moment is, for me, the literary moment, and extends from *Atala*, through *René*, through the *Martyrs*, to the *Last of the Abencerrages*), M. de Chateaubriand at that time enjoyed as a poet a good fortune that very few obtain: he met two friends, two unique critics, Fontanes and Joubert, expressly made for him, to warn or to guide him. Ordinary mortals have only one guardian angel, he had two: one entirely a guardian, Fontanes, restraining him in private, defending him when necessary before all, covering him with his shield in the fray; the other, stimulating rather and inspiring, M. Joubert, encouraging him in an undertone, or murmuring soft counsels in a contradiction full of grace. The best, the most delicate criticism that could be written on the first and great literary works of M. de Chateaubriand may still be found in the Letters and Thoughts of M. Joubert. This is nct the place to investigate and to call special attention to this criticism; I shall, however, touch upon it presently.

The life of M. Joubert is all in his thoughts; but the little that is to be said of this life would be incomplete, if one did not speak of Mme. de Beaumont. This daughter of the former minister M. de Montmorin, who had escaped the fate of the rest of her family during the Reign of Terror, and found grace on account of her dejection

and pallor, was one of those pathetic beings who only glide through life, and leave a luminous track. M. Joubert, already married, who used to spend a part of the year at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, had met her in Burgundy at the door of a cottage where she had taken shelter. He immediately attached himself to her; he loved her. He would have loved her with a stronger feeling than friendship, if that exquisite soul had known a stronger feeling. Mme. de Beaumont, still young, had an infinite grace. Her mind was quick, solid elevated; her form delicate and ethereal. She had once known and appreciated André Chénier. Rulhière had engraved for her a seal representing an oak-tree with the motto: 'A breath stirs me, and nothing shakes me'. The motto was just, but the picture of the oak may appear ambitious. Be that as it may, this frail and graceful exterior, this *sentient reed* which seemed to yield to the slightest breath, enclosed a strong and ardent soul, capable of a passionate devotion. Struck in her nearest and dearest, the victim of an ill-matched union, she cared little for life; affected by a mortal disease, she felt this life escaping from her, and hastened to sacrifice it for another. In expectation of her end, her distinguished spirit wasted its powers and interested itself, happy to spread sweet approbation around her. Somebody said of Mme. de Beaumont that she loved merit as others love beauty. When M. de Chateaubriand, arrived in Paris, was presented to her, she at once recognized this merit in its most seductive form of poetry, and she adored it. This was, after his sister Lucile, the first great devotion inspired by that figure of René, who was destined to inspire more than one since, but none more precious. The feeling with which she inspired M. Joubert it would be difficult to define: it was an active, tender, perpetual solicitude, without storms and troubles, full of warmth, full of rays of light. This too intense spirit, which could not walk slowly, loved to fly and soar near her. He had a *chilly* spirit, as he said; he liked it to be *fine* and *warm* around; with her he found that serenity and that warmth of affection, and he drew from it strength in indulgence. As she despised life, he was constantly preaching to her to take care of it and love it; he would have liked to teach her to hope again—

'I have good reasons, he wrote to her, for wishing you health, since I have seen you; I know the importance of it, since I have it not. . . . *It will be sooner over*, you say. Sooner, yes, but not soon. It takes long to die, and if, to speak unfeelingly, it is sometimes pleasant to be dead, it is frightful to be dying for centuries. In short, we must love life while we have it: that is a duty'.

He repeats this truth of morality and friendship to her in every form: he would have liked to calm, to restrain in her that activity which devoured her and used up her frail organs. He would have wished to breathe into her that resigned word of Mme. de La Fayette: *It is enough to be*—

'Be reposeful, he said to her, in love, in esteem, in veneration, I entreat you with clasped hands. That is at this moment, I assure you, the only means of committing few faults, of adopting few errors, of suffering from few ills'. 'To live, he said again, is to think and feel one's soul; all the rest, drinking, eating, etc., though I attach importance to them, are only the groundwork of life, the means of keeping it up. If it were possible not to need them, I could easily become resigned and could do very well without a body if I was left with all my soul'.

He had his reasons for speaking thus, he who, as somebody remarked of him, looked like a soul that has accidentally met with a body, and puts up with it as best it can. He advised this amiable friend therefore to rest herself, to be inactive, to follow the only method of life which did him good, to take long rests on her back and *count the rafters*—

'Your activity, he added, will rise up in anger against such a happiness; let us see whether your reason will not be of my opinion. Life is a duty; one should make a pleasure of it as far as it is possible, as of all other duties, and a half-pleasure if one cannot do better. If the care of keeping it up is the only one it pleases Heaven to put upon us, we must perform it cheerfully and with the best possible grace, and we must stir this sacred fire, and warm ourselves at it to the best of our ability, until some one comes and says: *It is enough*'.

These tender recommendations were vain. Mme. de Beaumont had so little hold on life, that it seemed as if her life depended upon her will alone. A pure illusion!

her malady was only too real, and she herself had little to do with hastening her destiny. She decided to visit the waters of the Mont-Dore in the summer of 1803, and from there to proceed to Rome, where she joined M. de Chateaubriand; shortly after her arrival there she died. One should read M. Joubert's letter written during this visit to Rome. He did not believe she would go; he had hoped to himself that she would recoil before so much fatigue and so many causes of exhaustion. The last letter he writes her (October 12, 1803) is full of a tender emotion; we feel it to be a revelation as it were, long contained, which he at last makes to himself; he had never been so conscious of how much he loved her, how necessary she was to him—

'All my spirit, he wrote, is returned to me; it gives me great pleasures; but they are spoiled by a despairing reflexion: I have you no longer, and assuredly I shall not have you within call for a long time, to listen to my thoughts. The pleasure I once felt in speaking is entirely lost for me. I am making a vow of silence; I remain here the winter. My private life will be entirely divided between Heaven and myself. My soul will preserve its habits, but I have lost the delight of them.

'Adieu, he exclaimed at the end, adieu, cause of so many pains, you who have so often been to me the source of so many blessings. Adieu! take care of and spare yourself, and come back some day amongst us, if only to give me for a single moment the inexpressible pleasure of seeing you again'.

In the two years which had preceded (1800–1803), there was formed around Mme. de Beaumont a little assembly, which has been often spoken of, which was very short in duration, but had life and activity and deserves to hold a place apart in literary history. That was the hour when the whole of society was being reborn, and many salons offered to the exiles and waifs of the Revolution the so welcome enjoyments of conversation and wit. There were the philosophic and literary circles of Mme. Suard, of Mme. d'Houdetot, that of the Abbé Morellet (conducted by his niece, Mme. Chéron); there ruled, properly speaking, the men of letters and philosophy, the direct continuers of the last century. There were the society salons proper of a more varied and diversified composition, the salon of Mme. de La Briche, that of Mme. de Vergennes, where

her daughter Mme. de Rémusat distinguished herself, that of Mme. de Pastoret, of Mme. de Staël when she was in Paris, and others besides, each of which had its dominant tone and its shade of colour. But, in a corner of the Rue Neuve-du-Luxembourg, a salon, much less conspicuous, much less lighted up, united in intimacy a few friends around an uncommon personality. Here gathered the young generation of poets, representing the new sentiment and the future. The habitués of the place were M. de Chateaubriand, even his sister Lucile during a whole winter, M. Joubert, Fontanes, M. Molé, M. Pasquier, Chênedollé, M. Gueneau de Mussy, a M. Jullien, very well informed on English literature, Mme. de Vintimille. That was the stock; the others that might be mentioned only came occasionally. The ray of sunshine which followed the 18 Brumaire had made itself felt in this corner of the world more than elsewhere: one loved, one took up with gladness every new genius, every new talent: one enjoyed him as an enchanter; imagination had re-blossomed, and one might have inscribed over the door of the place the words of M. Joubert, 'Admiration has reappeared and rejoiced a saddened earth'.

These happy meetings, these complete gatherings, have only a day here below. After the loss of Mme. de Beaumont, M. Joubert continued to live and think, but with less delight; he often spoke of her with Mme. de Vintimille, the best friend she had left behind her; but nothing was ever formed again like the gathering of 1802, and, after the end of the Empire, politics and affairs had relaxed, if not dissolved, the relations of the principal friends. M. Joubert, isolated, living with his books, with his dreams, jotting down his thoughts on scraps of paper which had no connexion, would have died without leaving anything finished or durable, if one of the connexions of the family, M. Paul Raynal, had not undertaken the pious duty of gathering these fragments, of mounting them in a certain order, and making of them a string of precious stones, as it were. They form the volumes which are published to-day in a second edition.

Having spoken of precious stones, I will say at once that there are too many of them. An English poet

(Cowley) has said : 'One ends by doubting whether the Milky Way is composed of stars, there are so many of them!' There are too many stars in M. Joubert's heaven. We would like more intervals and more repose. 'I am like Montaigne, he said, incapable of continuous discourse. In all things intermediate ideas seem to fail me, or they weary me too much'. These intermediate ideas, if he had taken the trouble to express them, would not, I think, weary us, but would rather rest us in reading him. We are conscious of an effort, often happy, but an effort all the same. 'If there is a man, he says, who is tormented with the cursed ambition of condensing a whole book into a page, a whole page into a sentence, and that sentence into a word, I am he'. His method is to always translate a thought into a picture; the thought and the picture form one to him, and he does not think he holds the one until he has found the other. 'It is not my sentence that I polish, but my idea. I wait until the drop of light which I need is formed and drops from my pen'. This string of thoughts consists then only of drops of light; the eye of the mind is dazzled in the end. 'I would like, he says again, giving a wonderful definition of himself, I would like to make the exquisite sense pass into the common sense, or make the exquisite sense common'. Good sense alone wearies him; the ingenious without good sense rightly appears to him contemptible: he wishes to unite the two, and that is no small undertaking. 'Oh! how difficult it is, he exclaims, to be both ingenious and sensible!' La Bruyère had felt the same difficulty before him, and also confessed the same at the beginning of his work: 'Everything has been said, and we come too late by seven thousand years, since there have been men in the world, and thinking men'. M. Joubert acknowledges the same thing: 'All things which are easy to say well have been perfectly said; the rest is our affair or our task: a painful task!' I will first point out the drawback and the defect. These books of maxims and condensed moral observations, like that of La Bruyère already and above all that of M. Joubert, cannot be read consecutively without fatigue. It is distilled spirit fixed in all its essence: one cannot take much of it at a time.

The first chapters of the first volume are not those I

like most; they treat of God, of creation, of eternity and many other things. To the difficulty peculiar to the subjects is added that which is born of the author's subtlety. Here we find not only Plato, but St. Augustine in strong doses and without the connexion of ideas. Decidedly, it will be expedient some day to compress all these metaphysical chapters into one, very much reduced, into which will be admitted only the beautiful, simple, acceptable thoughts, rejecting all those which are equivocal or enigmatic. On this condition alone these volumes of M. Joubert might be made, not only a library work like the present one, but also (so easy a task by exercising choice) one of those handsome little books which he loved, and which would justify in every respect his motto: *Excel, and thou wilt live!*

It is when he comes back to speak of manners and arts, of antiquity and of the age, of poetry and criticism, of style and taste, on all these subjects he pleases and charms us, and appears to us to have added a new and notable share to the treasure of his most excellent forerunners. Taste, for him, *is the literary conscience of the soul.* No more than Montaigne does he love the *bookish* style, the style that smells of ink and which one never has except with pen in hand: 'In our written language there must be voice, soul, space, free air, words that subsist quite by themselves and that bring their place with them'. That life which he demands of the author, and without which style exists only on paper, he expects also in the reader: 'The writers who have influence are only those who express perfectly what others think, and who awake in men's minds ideas or sentiments which were struggling to come forth. Literatures exist at the bottom of minds'. Thus, he who understands so well the ancients, the antiquity of Rome, of Greece, and that of Louis XIV, does not ask the impossible of us; he will tell us to feel it, but not to return to it. In the matter of expression, he still prefers the sincere to the beautiful, and the truth to the semblance—

'*Truth* in style is an indispensable quality, which suffices to recommend a writer. If we should try to write to-day, on all sorts of subjects, as they wrote in the time of Louis XIV, there would be no truth in our style, for we have no longer the

same humours, the same opinions, the same manners. . . . A woman who tried to write like Mme. de Sévigné would be ridiculous, because she is not Mme. de Sévigné. The more the kind of writing holds together with the character of the man, with the manners of the time, the more should the style depart from that of those writers who were models only in so far as they excelled in showing, in their works, either the manners of their epoch or their own character. Good taste itself, in this case, permits one to depart from the best taste, for taste changes with manners, even good taste'.

If such be the case for us with regard to the style of Louis XIV, how much more will it be the case with regard to high antiquity, and can one hope to return to it? M. Joubert is content to wish that we should adore and feel a tender regret for what cannot be recovered—

'In the luxury of our writings and our life, let us love at least and regret that simplicity which we no longer possess and which perhaps we can never again possess. In drinking from our gold, let us regret the ancient cups. In fine, in order not to be corrupted in all things, let us cherish what is better than ourselves, and save from the perishing wreck our tastes and judgments'.

What M. Joubert especially demands of the moderns, is not to exaggerate their faults, not to go too far, nor throw themselves with all their weight to the side to which they incline. An ideal and ethereal nature, he dislikes above all the sensual, the turgid, the colossal. We have for some years been very sensible to what we call force, power. Often, when I have hazarded some critical remark on a talent of the day, I have been met with the reply: 'What matter! this talent has power'. But what kind of power? M. Joubert will reply for me: 'Force is not energy: some authors have more muscle than talent. Force! I neither hate nor fear it; but I am, thanks to Heaven, quite undeceived with regard to it. It is a quality which is praiseworthy only when it is hidden or clothed. In the vulgar sense, Lucan had more of it than Plato, Brébeuf more than Racine'. He said again: 'Where there is no refinement, there is no literature. A piece of writing in which we see only force and a certain fire without brilliancy, proclaims only character. Any one may produce such works, if he has sinews, bile, blood, pride'. M. Joubert adores enthusiasm,

but he distinguishes it from explosiveness, and even from verve, which is only of secondary quality in inspiration, and which *stirs*, whilst the other *moves* : 'Boileau, Horace, Aristophanes had verve ; La Fontaine, Menander and Virgil had the most pleasing and most exquisite enthusiasm that ever was'. Enthusiasm, in this sense, might be defined as a sort of *exalted peace*. Beautiful works, according to him, do not exhilarate, but they enchant. He demands agreeableness, and a certain amenity, even in austere subjects ; he demands them everywhere, even in profundity ; 'We must carry charm with us into the depths, and introduce into those dark caverns which we have only recently penetrated the pure and ancient light of ages less instructed, but more luminous than ours'. These words *luminous* and *light* frequently recur in him and betray that winged nature that loves the sky and the heights. The brilliant, which he distinguishes from the luminous, does not lure him : 'It is good, it is beautiful, that thoughts should shine, but they should not sparkle'. What he especially wishes them to have is splendour, which he defines as a peaceful, intimate, uniformly distributed light, which penetrates an entire object.

Much might be extracted from M. Joubert's chapters on criticism and style, about his judgments on the various writers ; here he appears original, bold, almost always true. He astonishes at first reading, most generally he satisfies one after reflexion. He possesses the art of freshening up worn-out precepts, of renovating them for the use of an epoch which only half clings to tradition. From this side, he is an essentially modern critic. In spite of all his veneration of the antique and his regrets for the past, we at once distinguish in him the stamp of the time in which he lives. He is not averse to an appearance of studied elegance, and sees in it a misfortune rather than a defect. He goes so far as to believe 'that it is permissible to depart from simplicity, when that is absolutely necessary in order to please, and when simplicity alone would not be beautiful'. If he demands the natural, it is not the vulgar natural, but the exquisite natural. Does he always attain it ? He feels that he is not exempt from a certain degree of subtlety, and he excuses it : 'Often one cannot avoid passing through

the subtle in order to rise and reach the sublime, just as in order to mount to the skies we must pass through the clouds '. He often raises himself to the loftiest ideas, but never by following the high roads; he has his paths which escape the sight. In short, to tell the whole truth, he has a singularity and an individual *humour* in his judgments. He is an indulgent *humorist*, sometimes reminding us of Sterne, or rather of Charles Lamb. He has a manner which makes him say nothing, absolutely nothing, like another. That is perceptible in the letters he writes, and does not fail to weary in the long run. By all these marks, M. Joubert is not a classic but a modern, and as such he appears to me more qualified perhaps than any other to accentuate good advice, and drive in the shaft.

I have often asked myself what form a French Rhetoric course should take, in order to be sensible, just, natural. I have had occasion, once in my life, to lecture on the subject in several sittings to young men. What should I have done in order not to drop into routine, and not to risk myself in innovations? I began simply with Pascal, with his Thoughts on literature, in which the great writer had recorded a few of the observations he had made on his art; I read them aloud with comments. Then I took La Bruyère in his chapter on *Works of the Intellect*. I then passed on to Fénelon for his *Dialogues on Eloquence* and his *Letter to the French Academy*; I read here and there, choosing the points and always commenting with the help of a few examples, not excluding if necessary living authors. Then came Vauvenargues, with his Thoughts and his Literary Characters. From Voltaire I borrowed his articles on *Taste* and *Style*, in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, his *Temple of Taste*, a few passages from his letters, in which he criticizes Boileau, Racine and Corneille. To these I joined, in order to extend the horizon a little at this period, a few considerations on the spirit of Goethe and on the English taste of Coleridge. Marmontel, in his *Elements of Literature*, then furnished me with the article on *Style*, an excellent piece. I took care not to forget Buffon on the same subject, to crown the whole. Then, the classical circle accomplished, I gave M. Joubert to my young people as a sort of dessert, as a recreation, as a final little treat,

a feast worthy of Pythagoras! And my French Rhetoric course was finished.

To sum up, if it were a question of allotting him his character, M. Joubert had all the delicacy one can desire in a mind, but he had not all the power. He was one of 'those meditative and fastidious minds which are continually distracted from their work by immense prospects and the far distances of the *celestial beautiful*, some picture or ray of which they would like to place everywhere'. They consume themselves in taking pains. He had in too high a degree a sense of the perfect and finished: 'To finish one's thought! he exclaimed, that is long, that is rare, that gives an extreme pleasure; for finished thoughts easily enter into men's minds; they do not need to be even beautiful to please, it is enough if they are finished. The situation of the soul which has had them communicates itself to other souls, and transmits to them its repose'. He sometimes enjoyed that delight of finishing a thought, but he never enjoyed that of joining them together and composing a monument.

A philosopher of these days, himself a man of infinite esprit, is accustomed to distinguish three kinds of minds, as follows—

The first, powerful at the same time and delicate, who excel as they know how, accomplish what they conceive, and attain to the great and the truly beautiful; a rare élite among mortals!

The second, delicate before all, who feel their thought to be superior to their execution, their intelligence greater than their talent, even when the latter is very real. They are easily displeased, disdain a cheap popularity, and prefer to judge, enjoy and abstain, rather than to remain below their idea and themselves. Or if they write, it is in fragments, it is for themselves, at long intervals and in rare moments; all they have is an internal fertility, which has few confidants.

Lastly, the third kind of minds consists of those who, more powerful and less delicate or less fastidious, go on producing and expanding without being over-much displeased with themselves and their works; and it is fortunate that that is so, for the world would else run a risk of being deprived of many works which amuse and delight

them, and console them for those greater works which do not appear.

Is it necessary to say that M. Joubert, like M. Royer-Collard, belongs to the second class of minds, to those who look upwards and mostly produce inwardly?

Naturally, the conversation of these men is still better than the writings they leave, which offer only the smaller part of themselves. I have had the privilege of gathering a few flashes of M. Joubert's conversations from the papers of Chênedollé, who had jotted them down after leaving him. Would the reader like to know how M. Joubert talked of M. de Chateaubriand and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, comparing them together in respect of their excellences? Last week was entirely devoted to M. de Chateaubriand, and he formed the subject of a great feast of eloquence.[1] Yet, if I am not mistaken, and if I can predict from certain symptoms, the time is approaching when his great renown will have to suffer from one of those general insurrections which, when the day of reckoning comes, long protracted monarchies, universal monarchies, never escape. In order to defend his just claims to renown, it will be our duty then, in good criticism as in good warfare, to surrender without resistance all the parts of that vast domain which are not really beautiful nor susceptible of being seriously defended, and to retrench ourselves behind those portions which are quite superior and durable. The portions which I call really beautiful and impregnable are *René*, a few scenes of *Atala*, the story of Eudore, the description of the Roman Campagna, some fine pictures in the *Itinerary*; to these may be added some pages of political and especially polemical writings. Well! this is what M. Joubert said one day in February 1807, when, walking with Chênedollé before the colonnade of the Louvre, *René*, *Paul et Virginia* and *Atala* recurred to his memory—

'M. de Saint-Pierre's work resembles a statue of white marble, that of M. de Chateaubriand a statue of bronze cast by Lysippus. The former's style is more polished, the latter's more coloured. Chateaubriand takes for his matter heaven, earth and hell:

1 On December 6 there was a grand meeting at the French Academy to receive M. de Noailles, who took the vacant chair of M. de Chateaubriand and delivered a Eulogy of him; M. Patin replied.

Saint-Pierre chooses a well-illumined earth. The style of the one appears fresher and younger; the other's more ancient: it appears to be of all times. Saint-Pierre seems to choose what is purest and richest in the language: Chateaubriand takes from everywhere, even from vicious literatures, but he works a real transmutation, and his style resembles that famous metal which, in the burning of Corinth, was formed of a blend of all the other metals. One has a varied unity, the other a rich variety.

'Both deserve a reproach. Saint-Pierre has given to matter a beauty which does not belong to it; Chateaubriand has given to passions an innocence which they do not possess, at least not more than once. In *Atala*, the passions are covered with long, white veils.

'Saint-Pierre has only one line of beauty which turns and returns indefinitely upon itself, and loses itself in the most graceful contours: Chateaubriand employs all lines, even defective ones, the kinks of which he makes to serve the truth of details and the pomp of the whole.

'Chateaubriand produces with fire; he melts all his thoughts in the fire of heaven.

'Bernardin writes by the light of the moon. Chateaubriand in the sunlight'.

I will not add anything after thoughts so well worthy to be remembered, except a hope that, when a new edition of M. Joubert is prepared, these may be added.

MEMOIRS OF NAPOLEON[1]

Monday, December 17, 1849.

THE subject is worth returning to: lately, on the occasion of M. Thiers' work, I ventured to touch upon Napoleon as a legislator and conqueror; to-day, on the subject of these new and very authentic Memoirs, published two years ago by the sons of General Bertrand and still, I know not why, unnoticed, I would like to say something of Napoleon as a writer and one of the masters of speech.

Every strong and great soul, in moments of animation, may be said to be a master of speech, and it would be strange if it were not so. A strong and living thought necessarily brings its expression with it. This is sufficiently proved by the simple natures of the people, in moments of passion; they find the right and often the only word. A strong soul which is always in the state of exaltation sometimes seen in simple souls, would continually have at its command a clear, frank and often coloured language. A literary education avails little for this quite natural expression, and, unless it has been of the first order, would be capable rather of impairing it. Napoleon's literary education had been much neglected, very unequal. Coming from a semi-savage island, placed in a military school and devoted to mathematical studies, not finding in French the language of his nurse, young Bonaparte on mastering that idiom to render his ideas and feelings, must at first have subjected it to a certain strain and bent it the wrong way. His first attempts are well known. He sacrificed to the bad taste of the day. He had his declamatory, and as we

1 *Campaigns in Egypt and Syria.* Memoirs dictated by Napoleon (2 vols., October, with Atlas, 1847).

might say his romantic period. When he competed at the Academy of Lyons in 91, he had something of the tone of the Abbé Raynal; when in 96 he wrote impassioned letters to Josephine, he still had the *Nouvelle Héloïse* in his mind. He ascribed some of his genius to Ossian and would like to have put him into his box, as Alexander did with Homer.

I have known men of taste, but of a restricted taste and one nourished in the shadow of the study, who, when judging Napoleon for his talent for speech, never got beyond that first impression: Daunou, for example, a writer of pure, chastened and ornate style. Daunou had merited the prize at Lyons in the competition in which, if the award had been made, Bonaparte would probably have had only the second place, and he continued to the end to judge this singular competitor, from the literary point of view, as a man who has won the prize judges one who has only gained an accessit.

But after these years, and no doubt from his early youth upwards, when Napoleon talked, he put into it all his spirit and genius. He might have had his extravagances, his asperities, but he stripped off all bad taste. I find, told at length, one of those conversations he held at Ancona during his first Italian campaign, and I find it where one would least have expected it, in the notes to a poem (*La Chute de Napoléon*) published by M. Collot in 1846. M. Collot at that time accompanied the General-in-Chief as Commissariat officer. He must have jotted down the conversation from memory and shortly after hearing it. In the form in which we read it, it forms a memorable scrap of history, in which Robespierre's government is judged from a higher standpoint. The interesting point about it is that the author of the poem records it reluctantly and thinks it odious. The peculiarity of Napoleon's conversations, as of Pascal's, was that they engraved themselves, willing or unwilling, upon the minds of those who heard them, that we recognize them even through the medium of the most commonplace witnesses, and one is quite surprised, when finding them reported anywhere, by the sudden brilliancy they cast upon the insignificant pages which accompany them.

I have mentioned Pascal: he is perhaps of modern writers the one whom Napoleon's language approaches

nearest, in respect of character, when the latter is quite himself. In the order of styles, it would seem more natural to compare him with great kings and great ministers who have left writings. We have the Works of Louis XIV, where the language has an impress of nobility and good sense, true models of an elevated and moderate kingly style. But by their very tone of moderation they belong to the temperate kind, which is not that of Napoleon. Frederick's Memoirs and those of Cardinal Richelieu might also lend themselves to a comparison; but, although these great men, in essential moments, very easily throw off faults of manner from which they are not exempt, they still show them in their works as a whole and are subject sometimes, when writing, to a sort of mania for bel-esprit which the literary education of their time and their particular pretension gave them.[1] Napoleon has nothing of that, he is simple and unadorned. His military style offers a worthy pendant to the most perfect styles of antiquity in this kind, to Xenophon and Cæsar. But, in those two so polished captains, the line of narrative is more delicate, or at least lighter, more elegant. Napoleon is more abrupt, I might say more cold, if it were not that from time to time the great flashes of his imagination shed a light upon his style. He has received, we can perceive it, a less Attic education, and he knows more algebra than those two illustrious ancients. His brevity has a stamp of positiveness. In general, his will stamps itself upon his style. Pascal, in the immortal Thoughts which were found in his house in the state of notes, and which he wrote in that form for his own use, often recalls, by this very abruptness, by that despotic tone that Voltaire reproached him with, the character of Napoleon's dictations and letters. There was geometry in both of them. The language of both is engraved with the point of the compass, and certainly imagination is not wanting either.

Need I add that my comparison does not go any further? Simple as is Pascal's style, and though somebody was right in saying that, 'quick as thought, it appears to us so natural and so living, that he and his style seem

[1] That is truer of Richelieu than of Frederick, whose historical style is generally very sane.

to form an indestructible and necessary whole ', this style, as soon as it unfolds itself, has development, forms, number, quite an art the secret of which is not that of the hero who hastens to his conquest. Napoleon, when dictating, not only thinks, he acts; or, when he writes his reminiscences, he has so many things to recollect, that he compresses them into the smallest space. Napoleon remained at the point where style, thought and action are merged. In him, style properly speaking has not time to disconnect itself.

It is the reader who, on reflexion, does that labour to-day. While Napoleon was alive, action covered everything; one had no idea that, later, the language itself would offer matter for admiration. Now that the action is more remote, and the language remains, the latter shows itself with its proper qualities, and at the same time the memory of the action casts a reflexion and as it were a light upon it. What is only concise and solid appears great; what in another would be only a happy touch, here becomes a sublime flash. The words borrow from the man who utters them an extraordinary compass. Napoleon, for example, telling of his fortification of the Mediterranean coasts, after the siege of Toulon (1793), says: ' Napoleon employed the rest of the autumn in arming with good coast batteries the promontories from Vado to the Var, in order to protect the navigation from Genoa to Nice. In January (1794) he spent a night on the Col di Tenda, from whence, at sunrise, he discovered those beautiful plains which were already the object of his meditations. *Italiam! Italiam!* ' He was thinking of a passage in Montesquieu when he said those words; but we, reading these simple lines, forget every secondary allusion. Montesquieu is himself eclipsed; it is the cry of Columbus from the mast-head, greeting the land; it is the outburst of genius discovering its world. We ourselves feel the emotion, and little is wanting to make us think those few words sublime, because they are explained and followed by Montenotte, Lodi and Rivoli.

Two years passed before Napoleon, who had just discovered his Italy from the top of the Col di Tenda, was able to see it again as a General-in-Chief and to launch upon it this time as a conqueror. On that day in March 1796 when, coming to Nice to take the command out of

Schérer's hands, and reviewing those tattered troops, he said to them: 'Soldiers, you are naked, badly fed; Government owes you much, it can give you nothing. . . . I will lead you into the most fertile plains in the world . . . there you will find honour, glory and riches. Soldiers of Italy, can you want courage or firmness?' on that day he instinctively discovered the military eloquence of which he is the model; he invented the form of address suited to French valour and made to electrify. Henri IV had his flashes of eloquence, happy sallies of wit which were repeated by Crillon and the nobles; but, here was wanted an eloquence on the new level of the great operations, adapted to the measure of those armies risen from the people, the brief, grave, familiar, monumental address. From the first day, among his means for waging great war, Napoleon discovered that one.

Each of his steps henceforth is marked by an address, by one of those historical words which one retains because they are illuminated by glory. He has a grand appropriateness; he divines the things of the past which one ought to know; he borrows from history only what fits his purpose. Hannibal, the Roman legions, Alexander, he cites them at the right moment, and does not overdo them; they are familiar things to him. Arriving at Toulon in May 1798, to take command of the army of the East, he said in his order of the day: 'Soldiers, you are one of the wings of the army of England. . . . The Roman legions, whom you have imitated but not yet equalled, fought against Carthage by turns on this same sea and on the plains of Zama'. But when embarking for Egypt, it was not so much the star of Scipio as that of Alexander which guided him.

The two present volumes, which deal with the expedition to Syria and Egypt, add much to what had been said of this undertaking in Napoleon's Memoirs, previously published. The tone of the narrative is that of developed and complete history. This time, the man who dictates is not in too great a haste; his imagination returns and dwells with complacency upon this episode, which was still the most fabulous of his life. Napoleon gives, at the commencement, the portraits of the most distinguished generals he took with him, Desaix, Kléber, Caffarelli Du Falga. The portrait of Kléber, that *Nestor*

of the army (so young was this army!), who was not fifty years old, is a finished model; I would quote it, if I did not fear that it might appear too simple to us with our need for colours. For, note it well, this man who has furnished themes for so many oratorical and other declamations, Napoleon, when he writes, is simplicity itself. It is a pleasure to see that one who has been the subject of so much wordiness is so little wordy himself. We have all seen the picture which represents Bonaparte scaling the Great Saint-Bernard on a galloping, rearing horse. David painted the most fiery steed he could imagine. Let us listen to Napoleon himself on this passage of the Saint-Bernard: 'The first Consul rode, in the most difficult passes, a mule belonging to an inhabitant of Saint-Pierre, described by the Prior of the Monastery as the most sure-footed in the whole country'. See the difference between the reality and the picture, or rather between declamation and truth. Still, I would not answer for it that Napoleon did not himself suggest the idea of the fiery steed to the painter; he liked the *decided kinds*, as he said; he liked them to the extent of not disliking the conventional. He was not sorry to see others using declamation, he reserved simplicity for himself, and that is especially true when he writes. I said that I did not dare to quote that portrait of Kléber; but now that I have taken my precautions, why should I not quote it? M. Thiers, in the first article written on Napoleon as a writer (*le National* of June 24, 1830), quoted the portrait of Masséna, which is in the same style. One has sometimes carricatured Kléber, the Danton of the camps. Here is the true portrait, in a few decisive touches—

'Kléber was the handsomest man in the army. He was the Nestor of the army. He was fifty years of age. His accent and manners were German. He had served for eight years as an infantry officer in the Austrian army. In 1790 he was appointed chief of a battalion of volunteers of Alsatia, his native country. He distinguished himself at the siege of Mayence, passed with the garrison of that place into the Vendée, where he served a year, made the campaigns of 1794, 1795, 1796 with the army of the Sambre-et-Meuse. He commanded the principal division, distinguished himself, rendered important services, acquired the reputation of a clever general. But his caustic wit made him enemies. He left the army for insub-

ordination. He was put on half-pay. He stayed at Chaillot during the years 1796 and 1797. He was in very straitened circumstances when in November 1797 Napoleon arrived in Paris. He threw himself into his arms. He was received with distinction. The Directory had a great aversion for him, and he paid it back to the full. Kléber had a certain carelessness in his character which easily made him the dupe of intriguers. He had favourites. He loved glory as the path to enjoyments. He was a man of wit, courage, understood war, was capable of great things, but only when forced by the necessity of circumstances; then the counsel of nonchalance and favourites was no longer in season'.

The first chapter is headed *Malta*, and deals with the taking of that island. The condition of the Order at that supreme moment, its intestine divisions, the dispositions of the Knights, the majority of them philosophers and men of the world, who were no longer anything but *old bachelors* in exile upon a rock, their absolute want of the great motives which lead men to sacrifice themselves, all is seen *en passant* with the eye of a moralist, this time in the service of a conqueror. 'The town of Malta could not, would not, was not to defend itself. It could not hold out against a bombardment of twenty-four hours. Napoleon assured himself that he could dare, and he dared'.

The taking of Malta did not arrest the progress of the army more than ten days. This army did not yet know whither he was leading it. It was known that they were first proceeding to Candia. 'This celebrated Crete excited the whole French curiosity'. But opinions were divided about the ulterior destination. 'Were they going to relieve Athens or Sparta? Was the tricolor flag to float over the Seraglio, or over the Pyramids and the ruins of ancient Thebes? Or were they going to march to India by Aleppo?' In thus exhibiting their uncertainties, it appears as if Napoleon himself, at the height of his dreams, finds a satisfaction in holding them in suspense, and that, in his preconceived plan of commencing by one of these things, he embraces them all in the distance at a time.

The second chapter offers a broad and exact description of Egypt considered under all its aspects. The colonizing genius is face to face with its object; he seizes it in its entirety and its smallest details; he organizes it. Here

is not a man whose object in describing things is to paint them for his amusement; if he describes them, he does so in order to know them thoroughly and make use of them. I love the painters and poets, and it is not I certainly who would belittle them; but I cannot help remarking the differences. A great painter, a great descriptive poet, Chateaubriand, travels, a few years after, in the East, in search of colours. He is returning from Greece and Jerusalem; he lands in Egypt, he journeys as far as Cairo, but the inundation of the Nile stops his further progress. It would be necessary to wait a few days for the waters to retire and afford him a near view of the Pyramids. He has not the patience to wait. And what does it matter to him? 'Egypt, says Eudore in *Les Martyrs*, all shining with a new inundation, appears to our eyes like a pregnant heifer that has just bathed herself in the waters of the Nile'. Behold the simile the picturesque poet went to seek; he has found it; he takes it with him. He wanted no more. What matters the rest?

Volney, Champollion, regard Egypt differently. Napoleon regards it more like Volney, as a serious observer who forgets nothing. Geography, configuration, climate, manners, religion, obstacles and resources, he analyzes, he measures everything. Then, when he has carried out to the end his calculations as an engineer and statesman; when the population, in its divers races, is held in check; when he has regulated the inundation and organized the desert, when all the wells are occupied and not a cubic foot of water is wasted, then only does he give a loose rein to his imagination; he retraces for himself the beautiful ideal of a well-governed Egypt: 'But what might this beautiful country become, after fifty years of prosperity and good government? The imagination delights in so enchanting a picture! A thousand sluices might master and distribute the inundation over every part of the territory, the eight or ten milliards of cubic fathoms of water which are annually lost in the sea would be distributed over all the low grounds of the desert'. . . . And he continues in this manner, upon a geometrical basis, to give free vent to a serious enthusiasm. He lengthens out at pleasure a picture which, from the technical, soon rises to the moral

in gigantic proportions, and which is crowned by the conquest of Hindostan and the civilization of the heart of Africa. It is in such pages that we feel how seriously at times Napoleon took his mission as a civilizing warrior, and that he was not only one more sword in this Eastern land of marvels, but a luminous sword.

In writing he also has his similes, you will readily believe it, but they are useful similes, which figure a result. 'The Bedouin Arabs are the greatest plague of Egypt. It must not be inferred that they ought to be destroyed; on the contrary, they are necessary. Without them, this fine country could maintain no communication with Syria, Arabia, the Oases. . . . To destroy the Bedouins *would be, for an island, to destroy all the vessels* because a great number serve for the incursions of pirates'. Elsewhere, he will show us the French columns on the march, surrounded, harassed by these Bedouins of the desert: 'They are like fleets followed by sharks'. Such is his picturesque, always sober and true. When he is purely picturesque, is when only a word is thrown out *en passant*. Thus, during the night of the landing of the army at Alexandria: 'The moon was shining in all her splendour. One could see as in full daylight the white ground of the arid Africa'. Thus, at Gizeh, during the burning of the Egyptian fleet: 'All night long, through the eddying flames of the three hundred burning Egyptian vessels, the minarets of Cairo showed in outline'. But these are only flashes which never retard the action. Only when speaking of the Mamelukes and their manœuvres, of that *brave and fine militia*, as he calls them, does he find pages almost descriptive; before engaging with them he appears to delight in seeing them deploy.

We might quote many a passage where the image is so closely bound up with the thought that it is inseparable from it, and is identical with the idea itself. Hardly arrived, Napoleon moves against Alexandria and begins the assault with only a handful of his men, and without waiting for his guns: 'It is a principle of war, he says, that when one is able to use the thunderbolt, one should prefer it to cannon'. He holds up this principle to other generals who, in a similar case, have lost several days, and have missed their opportunity through wishing

to be too well prepared. But, to make use of the thunderbolt in default of cannon, there is only one sure means, and that is to be the thunderbolt oneself.

The most remarkable chapter of the two volumes is assuredly that which deals with religious matters. He begins it with his explanation of the religion of Moses, of Jesus Christ and of Mohammed. This quite historical explanation, which offends nothing sacred, is great. But in the application, State reasons, in Egypt, make him incline without scruple to the side of Mohammed. Those statesmen who had best observed the genius of the Egyptian people regarded religion as the chief obstacle to the establishment of French authority. It was this obstacle which Napoleon endeavours before all to overcome and to turn to his advantage. How he set about it so effectually, by what precautions, by what artifices of language and elaborate management, we must hear from himself. He tells everything and observes no false reserve. From the height at which he places himself, and the way in which he speaks, it is evident that he sees in this conduct not imposture, but a justifiable cunning—

'The School or the Sorbonne of Gama-el-Azhar is the most celebrated in the East. It was founded by Saladin. Sixty doctors or ulemas deliberate on the points of faith, and explain the holy books. It was the only school that could set an example, lead the opinion of the East and of the four sects which divide it. These four sects differ from each other only on points of discipline; they each had for their head a mufti at Cairo. Napoleon neglected nothing to circumvent and flatter them. They were old men venerable on account of their manners, their learning, their wealth and even their birth. Every day at sunrise they and the ulemas of Gama-el-Azhar had the habit of betaking themselves to the palace before the hour of prayer. The whole Ezbekieh place was crowded with their followers. They arrived on their richly harnessed mules, surrounded by their domestics and a large number of staff-bearers. The French guards took up arms and rendered them the highest honours. Arrived in the halls, aides-de-camp and interpreters received them with marks of respect and regaled them with sherbets and coffee. A few moments after the General would enter, sit down in the midst of them, on the same divan, and try to inspire them with confidence by discussing the Koran, having the principal passages explained to him and manifesting a great admiration for the Prophet. On leaving this place, they went to the

mosques where the people were assembled. There they spoke to them of all their hopes, and allayed the distrust and the evil dispositions of that immense population. They rendered real services to the army '.

What is here summed up in a page, we find developed and confirmed in a thousand ways in the course of the narrative. The French administration had orders to respect the property of the mosques and the pious foundations. The chiefs of the Arab population, who were at the same time the religious leaders, recovered the authority which had been snatched from them by the Turks and the Mamelukes; it would seem as if the French had come solely for their sake. Since the Revolution, the French army practised no sort of religion; they had not attended the churches in Italy, nor did they attend them in Egypt. This circumstance did not escape the notice of the Mussulman doctors, and, seeing that these new-comers were at least not idolaters, they soon hoped to make believers of them. The *Sultan Kebir*, or *Great Sultan* (as they called Bonaparte), encouraged this hope of the doctors; he continually talked with them of the Koran, as if he desired instruction. He only asked for a year's time to bring the army round to his views. ' He had plans and estimates drawn up of a mosque large enough to contain the whole army, on the day they should acknowledge the law of Mohammed '. That was only a lure, for ' his unchanging opinion, he said, was that every man should die in his own religion '. But those demonstrations had a good effect. They touched, not only the religious chord, but also the fibre of Arab patriotism—

' Why, he said to them, is the Arab nation subject to the Turks? How is it that fertile Egypt, Holy Arabia, are dominated by nations of Caucasian race? If Mohammed were to come down to-day from heaven to earth, whither would he go? Would he go to Mecca? he would not be in the centre of the Mussulman empire. Would he go to Constantinople? But that is a profane city, where there are more infidels than believers; that would be going among his enemies. No, he would prefer the holy water of the Nile, he would come and dwell in the mosque of Gama-el-Azhar, that first key to the Holy Kaaba '. On hearing this speech, the countenances of the venerable old men beamed; they bowed their bodies, and, with arms crossed, they exclaimed: ' *Tayeh! tayeh!* Ah! that is indeed true '.

After the insurrection of Cairo, Napoleon did not depart from this system of protection of the old religious chiefs of the country. The soldiers murmured, but he held his ground. He seemed even to ignore the fact that the old Sheik Sadah was the head of the rebellion, and he received him as before. Kléber arrived at this moment from Alexandria, and, seeing that old man all in a tremble and kissing the General's hand, he asked him who he was—

'He is the head of the insurrection, Napoleon replied.—What! are you not going to shoot him?—No, these people are too foreign to us and our habits; they must have chiefs. I would rather they had chiefs like this man, who can neither ride nor wield a sword, than to see them led by men like Murad-Bey and Osman-Bey. The death of this impotent old man would lead to no good, and would be followed by more fatal results for us than you think'.

Kléber turned his back and did not comprehend. Afterwards, when he was himself General-in-Chief, he unwisely had the old man flogged, and the consequence was the dagger of fanaticism.

I cannot say how interesting this whole chapter appears to me by reason of the light it casts upon Napoleon's political conduct, upon the fixed point of his higher belief (belief in God), on his profound indifference to subordinate points, and on the extreme importance he yet affected to attach to them, in a word, on the rule of conduct he evidently regarded as the only law for the heads of empires, since he expounds it to us in terms so clear and unveiled. It is a great lesson in statesmanship; only it is curious that it is the very man who practised it to that degree, who divulges it with a sort of indiscretion or frankness. Analysis has to-day penetrated so far everywhere, that even he cannot help saying what he did and why he did it. Mohammed or Cromwell would have thought twice before betraying their motives in that way. In this chapter we see laid bare the work of an old society in course of reconstruction under a powerful hand, an old civilization with its essential parts, boldly replaced on the stocks, like a large ship. Napoleon comprehended at the very first that the majority of every society are *neutral* and only ask to be allowed

to exist and to submit, as long as they are guaranteed in their beliefs and their interests. When addressing those Arab chiefs, those ulemas and reverend doctors, those *respectable people* of the country, when trying on them his policy of consideration and reparation for those great interests of every society, religion, property, justice, the young conqueror was getting his hand in for the more delicate things he was to accomplish elsewhere. He was making his first experiment on nations less advanced than ours. Soon he will return to us with quite a practised hand. The chapter I am speaking of should be read immediately before that on the Concordat, and is henceforth inseparable from it.

In one place, Napoleon compares what he did immediately after his landing in Egypt with what Saint-Louis did there. He only speaks of the military mistakes of that sainted king: 'He spent eight months in prayer, when he should have spent them in marching, fighting and establishing himself in the country'. One cannot help smiling. All the other differences which Napoleon does not mention spring to the mind. One remembers the narrative of the naïve Joinville, so unlike our Monge and Berthollet. But Saint-Louis had need of all his misfortunes to be great, and it is in the order of the things of the heart that he has his crown.

Egypt, however beautiful he thought it at first, could be to Napoleon only a means and not an end. He tried to get out of it, and to open up the high road to the East by way of Syria. The plan and idea of this campaign are retraced with a precision which leaves no room for doubt about Napoleon's projects, very real at the time, in the direction of India. Meanwhile we skirt with him the mountains of Judæa. His genius embraces with grandeur its horizons. At Cairo Napoleon had read the Koran; once in Palestine, he opens the Bible: 'When camping on the ruins of these ancient cities, every evening the Holy Scriptures were read aloud, in the General-in-Chief's tent. The analogy and the truth of the descriptions were striking; they still fit this country, after so many centuries and changes'. There was a moment, then, when this great destiny almost turned aside for ever; one more victory might have made it incline towards Asia. It required a check to give him back to

us. From the moment when, arrested at Akka, Napoleon saw himself driven back to his first conquest, he felt himself restricted. News from France soon showed him that quite a new rôle was awaiting him: 'Everything announced to him, he says, that the moment indicated by Destiny was come'. Well! had he not served an adequate apprenticeship over there as head of an empire? I will not say that he was sick of Egypt, this powerful spirit was never sick of anything; but when one of his favourite dreams escaped his grasp, he had the power, he said, of *taking his spirit* and *carrying it elsewhere.* So he gave up Egypt without hesitation, and only had the time, on the eve of his abrupt departure, to dictate three memoranda for Kléber, in which he expounded his views on the internal policy to be followed and the military dispositions to be adopted. The man who dictated them would have been the only one capable of carrying them out. Thinking himself henceforth free from obligations towards his conquest, he yielded his fortune to the winds and waves, and to his star.

'We were in France, he says, after forty-five days' sailing; we had surmounted many dangers. It was remarked that, in the course of the navigation, Napoleon trusted entirely to the Admiral and never showed any uneasiness. He had no will. He gave only two orders, which twice saved him. He had set sail from Toulon on May 19, 1798. He had, therefore, been absent from Europe sixteen months and twenty days. During that short time, he had taken Malta, conquered Lower and Upper Egypt; destroyed two Turkish armies, taken their General, their baggage, their field artillery; ravaged Palestine, Galilee, and laid the foundations, henceforth solid, of the most magnificent colony. He had carried the sciences and the arts back to their cradle'.

In this simple and splendid summary there is only one thing we take objection to, that is the *henceforth solid foundations,* which he takes for granted for the Egyptian colony. In order to finish and keep up what he had established he would, as he so often experienced elsewhere, have had to leave another self in his place.

These two volumes of such fine narrative, all studded with the characteristic sayings which could have come from no other than the great witness himself, and some of which are added in pencil, over the dictation, in

Napoleon's own hand, do not stop at the moment of his departure from Egypt. They comprise an account and criticism of Kléber's and Menou's operations, until the evacuation of the colony. We also read an abstract and criticism of the military events which occurred in Europe during the years 98 and 99. These two volumes should be joined as an indispensable complement to the nine volumes of *Memoirs* published by Generals Gourgaud and Montholon, whose importance and artistic beauty were first pointed out by M. Thiers in 1830. They should be placed by the side of the curious volume on the wars of Julius Cæsar, published by M. Marchand in 1836, of which Carrel spoke so pertinently in the *National* of March 12 of the same year. And since I am on the subject of good judges who have already spoken of Napoleon as a writer, I will not forget M. Villemain in respect of one of the lectures of his Course on the eighteenth century; he touches upon Napoleon when dealing with the great Frederick. I also find, at the head of a volume entitled *Select Works* of Napoleon (1844), four or five most remarkable pages, signed with a pseudonym, but attesting a distinguished pen.[1]

The result henceforth, for all, is manifest: it was better for Napoleon to suffer to the bitter end his years of captivity and ill fortune, since he was to employ them in this way. Whilst appearing to survive his fame, he worthily increased it. Among the characteristic words we read in these last volumes, there is one which recurs to me and which I should reproach myself for not calling attention to, for it betrays an intimate thought, and it is one of those that Napoleon added to the manuscript with his own hand in pencil. It was at the battle of Aboukir, where he destroyed the Turkish army; Colonel Fugières, of the eighteenth line regiment, had both arms carried off by a cannon shot: 'You are losing one of your most devoted soldiers, he said to the General-in-Chief; *one day you will regret that you did not die like me on the field of the brave*'. When adding these words with his own hand, the prisoner of St. Helena was evidently looking back upon his past life; he seemed to say that the Colonel had prophesied, and that for him the hour of regret for his survival was come. Still, in spite

[1] These pages are by M. Léonce de Lavergne.

of the bitterness of his lot, Napoleon was not on the whole to regret living and supporting the devouring years of exile, if only to have time to consign to memory the acts of the past. One day, in headquarters at Austerlitz, the talk was about the tragedy *Les Templiers*, then in its newness. One of the characters in the play is a young man, by name Marigny, who always and persistently talks of wishing to die. Napoleon did not think it natural, and concluded the discussion by saying: '*One should wish to live, and know how to die*'. He practised this maxim even at St. Helena; he continued to the end to *wish to live*, and it is to this constancy that we owe it that we have in him, after the captain, the historian.

When all is said, and every tribute paid to the great style of the modern Cæsar, to that style in which thought and will predominate in the form of brevity (*imperatoria brevitas*), and where imagination appears in flashes, I may be permitted to consider him not entirely as the model style which should rule to-day. To try to imitate the process of diction of the hero who was able to abridge Cæsar himself would be to risk being sober even to meagreness, and to appear strained or abrupt. One must besides have done great things to have the right of being so bare and unadorned. Let us then reserve for our use, for the use of all, the literary style proper, which I distinguish from the Academic style (which, however, also has its value in its proper place); let us keep to the style of educated men who write as they think, but who do not think with that haste, with that impetuous and imperious movement, who think at their leisure, with calm deliberation, elevation and acuteness, without eschewing a certain pleasing circumlocution and the pleasures of lingering on the road. In a word, even in the presence of Cæsar, and not too far beneath him in the order of thought, there is still room for Cicero, and for all the varied forms of discourse, abundant, facile, eloquent and ornate, which that name of Cicero represents.

ADRIENNE LE COUVREUR

Monday, December 24, 1849.

THERE are names which live and of which one can speak at any time as of something present. Utter the names of Héloïse, of La Vallière, everybody knows them and yet is curious to hear of them again. One desires, one hopes always to learn something more about them. Brilliancy, romance, a destiny of emotion, of devotion and tenderness, a pathetic misfortune, that is what attracts us to those poetic figures, and what, once transmitted and consecrated, procures them in the imagination of the ages a continual rejuvenation. A legend forms around them as it were which does not die. If we knew where they lie buried, we would willingly visit their graves every year and piously renew the wreath. It is the same in a slight degree with Adrienne Le Couvreur. The reasons for this are rather confused ; we will try here to distinguish a few of them. She was the first actress in France who had both a brilliant stage career and enjoyed social consideration. She was loved by the most brilliant warrior of his time ; she inspired the greatest poet of the time with the most touching elegy. The public scandal caused by the refusal to bury her, the tragical explanation and the terrible suspicion which circulated on the subject of her death, imparted to her end a mysterious interest and made of her a victim whom one feels at once disposed to love and to avenge. What more can we say ? She is one of those who, when alive, possessed a charm, and, what is given to very few, this indescribable charm has survived : it continues to operate after her.

I have recently seen the play, full of action, in which two men of talent (and one of them the cleverest stagecraftsman of our time) have reconstructed her memory

and put it into action[1]: they conceived the part with an eye to a great actress, the Adrienne of our times, and adapted it to the person of the latter by means of some happy touches. Still, this would not be an adequate reason for my meddling with these stage matters and encroaching upon a domain which is not mine, if I had not been informed of certain new documents, of some original pieces relative to the affair of the poisoning, as well as of a few unpublished letters which do honour not only to the talent but also to the intellect and the uprightness of that remarkable person. One of my friends, a book-lover with passion and discrimination, has fallen under that indescribable charm in Mlle. Le Couvreur which I have spoken of; he has instituted a curious search after remains of her, and, as he has a lucky hand, he has been enabled to add new material to what we already knew on several points. Awaiting this early publication which M. Ravenel is preparing, and mindful of the interesting drama which is still applauded, I may be allowed to dwell for a moment on this theme of Adrienne Le Couvreur as being in season.

Adrienne was born about 1690, at Fismes, between Soissons and Rheims. Her father, a hatter by trade, transplanted his family in 1702 to Paris, and went to live in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, not far from the Comédie. This proximity gave the child occasion to strengthen a passion for the stage which was born with her. 'Several of the citizens of Fismes, relates the Abbé d'Allainval, whom we can only re-echo on these beginnings, have told me that when very young she took a pleasure in reciting poetry, and that they often invited her to their houses to hear her. The demoiselle Le Couvreur was one of those extraordinary persons who create themselves'. At the age of fifteen she arranged with some young people of the neighbourhood to play *Polyeucte*, and the little comedy *Le Deuil* (by Thomas Corneille). The rehearsals were held in the house of a grocer in the Rue Féron. The affair was spoken of in the quarter. Adrienne played Pauline and was not too badly supported by her companions; there was a Sévère who distinguished himself by the truth of his acting.

[1] The play of *Adrienne le Couvreur*, by MM. Scribe and Legouvé, in which Mlle. Rachel has the principal part.

The wife of the Président Le Jay put her mansion in the Rue Garancière at the disposal of the little company; the great world flocked thither; it is said that the doors, guarded by eight Suisses, was forced by the crowd. But no sooner was the tragedy ended, when the police entered and forbade the continuation. The after-piece was not given. Thus ended these unprivileged performances. Adrienne played again for some time in the precincts of the Temple, under the protection of the Grand Prior of Vendôme; then it is known that she had lessons from the actor Le Grand, and we lose sight of her. She makes her tours in the provinces and the adjoining countries, on the stages of Lorraine and Alsace. She must have returned to Paris more than once in the intervals, but she did not reappear there, to make her début, until the spring of 1717, in the rôles of Monime and Electre, and she at once showed herself an accomplished actress. It was said openly that she began where the great actresses end. She was then over twenty-five years of age, and she occupied the stage for thirteen years.

In an art which leaves so few traces it is difficult, judging at a distance, to do more than report the testimony of contemporaries, and one has hardly any means of checking them. In this case the praises are unanimous and all agree in the same sense. 'To her is given the credit, says the *Mercure* (March 1730), of having introduced simple, natural and noble declamation, and of having abolished sing-song'. She strove after a greater correctness and truth in costume; she was the first, for example, to put on court robes in the parts of queens and princesses. She made this innovation when playing Queen Elizabeth in the *Comte d'Essex*. In assuming the costume of a queen, she also adopted the tone of a queen, that is to say, she spoke naturally, without ostentation, without thinking herself obliged, as did the others, to make up by a borrowed solemnity for what had been hitherto wanting in costume. She was like a princess *acting for her pleasure*. She also played in comedy proper, but with less range and resourcefulness, and she shone only in a small number of comedy parts. Her proper sphere, her incomparable glory was in the pathetic. 'She had the art of identifying herself with a character to the degree necessary to express the great passions and to make them felt in all their

power. Mlle. Champmeslé is said to have had a most sonorous voice, and that when she was declaiming, if one had opened the box at the farther end of the theatre, her voice would have been heard in the Café Procope. I doubt whether it would have been the same with Mlle. Le Couvreur, but her voice was insinuating, with correctness and delicacy: she sustained even feeble lines, and imparted all their value to the most beautiful'. She had not many notes in her voice, but she was able to vary them infinitely, to add inflexions, some richness, and something indescribably expressive in the air of her face and in her whole person, which left nothing to be desired. She excelled in gradations, in those sudden transitions from one tone to another which express the changes of passion. Passages have been recorded in her rôles of Bérénice, Elizabeth and Electre, in which she carried away all hearts by these carefully prepared and moving contrasts. Never had the art of dumb scenes been so well understood, the art of good listening, of playing with the whole person and expressive attitude, whilst another actor was speaking. When off the stage she does not appear to have had any very striking and extraordinary beauties; but she had the power of adjusting them naturally, to make the whole harmonious. We know her portrait by Coypel, who painted her in full mourning apparel, holding her urn as *Cornélie*. The *Mercure* shows her more natural, 'perfectly well proportioned in her middle stature, with a noble and composed bearing, head and shoulders well placed, eyes full of fire, a handsome mouth, a rather aquiline nose, and much charm in air and manners; no stoutness, but her cheeks pretty full, with features well marked to express grief, joy, tenderness, terror and pity'. Much soul, much feeling, a constant study, a passionate love for her art, all contributed to form in her that ideal of a great tragedian, which does not appear to have been till then realized to the same degree. Mlle. Duclos was only a representative of the declamatory school; and if Mlle. Desmares and the Champmeslé had been great and fine in parts, they had certainly not attained to the perfection of ensemble of Adrienne Le Couvreur. When the latter appeared, she had no other model but her own taste, and she created.

At all times, in the various arts and particularly in that of the actor, there have been two manners opposed to each other, the manner of the official school (Conservatoire or Academy) and that of the original talents ; the manner which declaims or sings, and that which speaks. We find these two schools already in opposition and at war in the beginnings of our stage, Molière's troop at loggerheads with that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Remember the *Impromptu de Versailles*, where the issue is so well stated. Molière holds that even in tragedy the actor should speak naturally, *humanly* ; the difficulty lies in reconciling with perfect dignity and nobility this naturalness, which can in this case be only a very carefully prepared and artistic naturalness. Molière in his own person was only imperfectly successful in tragic parts, for which he was not fitted by nature. Baron, his pupil, entirely formed by his lessons, was his mouth-piece. Mlle. Le Couvreur had seen Baron, when, old and still excellent, he returned to the stage in 1720 ; but she had not awaited his return to realize in her own fashion Molière's poetic art and to unite in herself the qualities, at once lofty, pathetic and natural, of the perfect tragic actress.

It is related that at her débuts in Paris, when the whole house was excitedly applauding, there was one man, sitting in the corner of a box, who did not yield to the universal enthusiasm, but merely exclaimed from time to time and at rare passages : '*C'est bon, cela !*' as if he meant it to be understood that the rest was not equally good. He was denounced to the actress, who desired to make the acquaintance of this eccentric and recalcitrant person, and in a gracious note invited him to dine with her *tête-à-tête*. It was Du Marsais, the philosopher-grammarian, a man of simple manners, little fashioned for society, frank and inexorably accurate. Before sitting down to table, he prayed Mlle. Le Couvreur to recite some piece, and whilst listening resumed his silent attitude, and only two or three times ejaculated his phrase : '*C'est bon, cela !*' Pressed for his reasons, he made no difficulty about stating them, and the result was a long friendship, during which the modest philosopher was not sparing of useful counsels, which all bore upon truth, naturalness and correctness of expression. He taught her never to give to her words any emphasis except that which suited

the situation. This advice found in the sound intelligence of Mlle. Le Couvreur an already prepared ground.

The part that Du Marsais played in relation to Mlle. Le Couvreur is half of that which the authors of the new play ascribe to Michonnet; and that reminds me that the actor who so excellently fills that part, M. Régnier, is himself preparing, for the early publication I have spoken of, a study of the talent and the dramatic invention of Adrienne Le Couvreur; so I will say no more about them here. This rôle of Michonnet is a double one: it combines that of the true, sincere, disinterested adviser, which Du Marsais played in real life, with that of the lover, who is equally true, sincere, devoted to the point of sacrifice, and this latter part we find also played in real life by another of her friends, Argental.

In her early youth Mlle. Le Couvreur had received many adorers, some of whom one is justified in naming, Voltaire for example. The latter, speaking to Thieriot of the lines which had been forced from him by his indignation at the burial of the actress, adds that this indignation, too strong perhaps, is 'pardonable in a man who has been her admirer, her friend, her lover, and who is besides a poet'. That is clear.

Mlle. Le Couvreur had two daughters who survived: one, born at Strasburg, daughter of M. de Klinglin, who was then or afterwards became first magistrate and *préteur*, as it was called, of that city; Voltaire in his letters several times mentions this *daughter of Monime.* Another daughter was born in Paris, and baptized at Saint-Eustache on September 3, 1710, as *daughter of Philippe Le Roy, officer of Monseigneur the Duke of Lorraine,* and of Adrienne Le Couvreur; this daughter married, in November 1730, Francœur, a musician at the Opera. The learned mathematician who died recently was of this family. But the great passion of Mlle. Le Couvreur, which put an end to the hazards of her first life, was her love for the Comte de Saxe, who first came to France in 1720, and settled there in 1723, saving frequent excursions and adventures. From the moment when she loved him, and in spite of his infidelities which were not infrequent, it appears that Mlle. Le Couvreur no longer considered herself free. Passionately loved by young d'Argental, she did all she could to cure him; in doing so she did

not use those half-measures which are only calculated to excite and stir up what they are supposed to combat; she set about it in a straightforward, loyal way, without reserve, like an honourable man. She wrote to him—

'In short, you wish me to write to you, against all sorts of reasons. Is it possible that with so much spirit you are so little master of yourself? What profit will you have, except the pleasure of exposing me to disagreeable annoyances, or even worse? I am ashamed to scold, when I pity you so; but you force me to it. Be more reasonable, I pray you, and tell the man you have charged to torment me to leave me a little breathing time: he has hardly left me any the last four days. I will let you see very clearly the impropriety of this conduct the first time chance brings us together, and I am not at a loss to convince you that you are in the wrong'.

'Adieu, unhappy boy. You drive me to despair'.

Hearing that d'Argental's mother, Mme. de Feriol, was thinking of getting her son out of the way, even of sending him to San Domingo, for fear lest he might propose marriage to her, Mlle. Le Couvreur did not hesitate to reassure her; she went to see Mme. de Feriol, and the latter's reception of her having given her little encouragement to speak, she wrote her a letter, noble in tone, admirable in sentiment, and like that of a woman who wishes to reconcile all natural duties with social proprieties. When writing this letter, dictated by her heart, she had no idea of the moral elevation on which she was placing herself, and this elevation is great, especially if we consider the sort of woman (a worthy sister of Mme. de Tencin, that is saying enough) whom she was addressing—

'(Paris, March 22, 1721.) Madame, I cannot learn, without being painfully grieved, the anxiety you are suffering and the plans it causes you to form. I might add that I am not less grieved to hear that you blame my conduct; but I write to you not so much to justify it as to protest that, with regard to what interests you, I will in future be guided by you. On Tuesday I asked permission to see you, with the intention of speaking to you with confidence, and of asking your commands. Your reception of me destroyed my zeal, and left me with a feeling of timidity and sadness. You ought, however, to know my true feelings, and if I may be so bold as to say more, not disdain to listen to my most humble remonstrances, if you do not wish to lose your son. He is the most respectful son and the most honourable man I have ever met. You would admire

him if he were not yours. Once again, Madame, deign to unite with me to put an end to an inclination which angers you, and which, whatever you may say, I do not encourage. Do not meet him with contempt or harshness; I would rather take all his hatred upon myself, in spite of the tender friendship and esteem I have for him, than tempt him in the smallest degree to show you disrespect. You are too greatly interested in his cure not to labour zealously to that end, but you cannot succeed alone, especially by opposing your authority to his inclination, or by painting me in unfavourable colours, even though they were true. It must indeed be an extraordinary passion to have existed so long without hope, in spite of mortifications, in spite of travels, and of his living eight months in Paris without seeing me, at least at my house, and without his knowing whether I should ever receive him. It was the belief that he was cured, that made me consent to see him in my last illness. You may easily believe that I should infinitely enjoy his friendship but for this unhappy passion, which astonishes as much as it flatters me, but of which I will not take advantage. You fear that seeing me will turn him from his duties, and you carry this fear so far as to adopt violent measures against him. In truth, Madame, it is not right that he should be made unhappy in so many ways. Do not add to my injustices; seek rather to compensate him; let all his resentment fall upon me, but let your kindness be some compensation to him.

'I will write to him what you please; if you wish, I will never see him again; I will even go into the country, if you think it necessary; but do not threaten to send him to the end of the world. He may be useful to his country; he will be the delight of his friends; he will crown you with satisfaction and glory: you have but to guide his talents and leave his virtues to act. Forget for a time that you are his mother, if being his mother makes you withhold the kindness that I ask you on my knees to show him. In short, Madame, you shall sooner see me retire from the world or love him with love, than suffer him to be tormented in future for me and through me . . .'

M. d'Argental did not know of this letter at the time it was written. Sixty years later, when he was over eighty years old, this letter was one day found among some old papers of his mother. He had it read to him, and only then did he entirely know the heart of the friend he had lost.

Everything already tells us: Mlle. L. Couvreur was not simply a woman of talent, she was a woman distinguished by her intelligence, by her heart and the most genuine qualities. In her profession she needed them in order to raise herself out of the inferior social state of the actress of the early eighteenth century. Molière, by the power

of genius and intellect, Baron, by his talent assisted by his very conceit, had raised the status of the actor in society, and maintained themselves there on a footing which inspired respect. But the women, even women of talent like the Champmeslé, had been unable to win consideration in any degree; they remained in the lowest social condition. The Champmeslé received visitors; they celebrated her in gallant poems, as did La Fontaine; they rhymed with the husband. A familiar tone prevailed in her house; but she had nothing in the nature of what might be called a salon. She did not succeed in winning that social esteem which shows itself in very slight shades of manner, that esteem which Ninon obtained. Racine, the tender Racine who was once in love with her, when he hears of the Champmeslé's death, speaks of her as of a *poor unfortunate*, and in a tone which even austere devoutness would never since then have permitted an honourable man of the world to use. One day, Mlle. Beauval, an actress who was a little anterior to Mlle. Le Couvreur, went to pay a visit to a young man of her acquaintance, the young Abbé Aunillon, who was ill. The young man was in his chamber with his mother when a lady was announced who asked to see him: 'A lady asks for my son!' said the astonished mother. She had hardly spoken the words, when a woman entered the room who said brusquely: 'No, Madame, it is not a lady, it is the Beauval'. Whilst making every allowance for the singularity of the person who said these words, we have here a true measure of the social prejudice which prevailed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The century which was to be that of Voltaire could not long suffer such an anomaly among the different interpreters of the arts, and Mlle. Le Couvreur was the first, not to protest, but (what is better) to bring about imperceptibly a revolution by the charm of her influence.

That it was a difficult task we may well believe. An actress was then at the bidding of a whole privileged class. It was Mlle. Le Couvreur to whom Lord Peterborough said: 'Come! show me much love and much wit'. What he said, quite bluntly like the eccentric that he was, many others thought they had a right to think, though they had the politeness not to say it. By means of her wit, her good sense, her sense of propriety and of modesty,

Mlle. Le Couvreur succeeded in forcing what no other in her profession was then either able or entitled to demand. She was the first in France to win, for the actress, the position of Ninon, that of a well-bred woman receiving the best company of men and even women, if the latter had any curiosity and a little courage. 'It is an established fashion to dine or sup with me, she wrote, because a few duchesses have been pleased to do me that honour'. She confesses that this honour had many burdens, and entailed acts of submission :—

'If my poor health, which is delicate, as you know, makes me decline to meet a party of ladies whom I have never seen, who only remember me from curiosity, or, if I may venture to say so, because I am in the fashion (for there is fashion in everything) : "Really, says one, she is putting on airs." Another adds : "That is because we are not titled"! If I am serious, for one cannot be gay in the midst of a lot of people one does not know : "So this is the girl who has so much wit? Don't you see that she despises us, and that one must know Greek to please her?" She goes to Mme. Lambert's, says a third; does that not explain the riddle?'

Mme. de Lambert was the friend of Fontenelle, of La Motte and Mairan. She was accused of keeping an office of bel esprit, because her house was 'the only one, with a few exceptions, says Fontenelle, which had kept itself free from the epidemic of play, the only one where people met to converse reasonably, and even wittily to suit the occasion'.

Mlle. Le Couvreur's house must have been on certain days one of the small number of those where wit and reason had a chance of meeting. She dwelt in a little house in the Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain, in which Racine is said to have lived, and that Mlle. Clairon occupied after her. A fortune which was considerable for the time and which amounted, it is said, to more than three thousand livres, procured her an honourable independence. On the days when she was not too much invaded by duchesses and people of fashion, Mlle. Le Couvreur liked to receive her friends :—

'My vanity, she said, does not think that a large number makes up for the want of real merit in persons ; I am not anxious to shine. I feel a hundred times more pleasure in saying nothing, but in listening to good things, in finding myself in the company

of wise and virtuous people, than in being deafened by all the insipid praises that are indiscriminately lavished upon me. Not that I am wanting in gratitude and the desire to please; but I think the approbation of a fool is only flattering when it is general, and that it becomes a burden when it has to be bought by special and repeated civilities'.

So she eschewed as much as possible the approbation of fools, and was satisfied with that of her friends. These honest friends she preferred to all, were Fontenelle, Du Marsais, Voltaire, d'Argental, the Comte de Caylus, a certain Abbé d'Anfreville, the Comte de Saxe and several intimate friends of the latter, such as the Marquis de Rochemore. To these may be added one or two intelligent women of social standing and not too much *grande-dame*, such as, for example, the wife of the President Berthier. Those, I imagine, might have formed the *personnel* of a supper at Mlle. Le Couvreur's on certain days, and there were assuredly in high places much less select societies than that. The tone which prevailed there cannot have resembled that which we see established, about the middle of the century, at Mlle. Quinault's suppers. The Memoirs of Mme. d'Epinay afford us a glimpse of the latter; the conversation is piquant, but free to licentiousness, which did not prevent it from sometimes becoming declamatory. That was not the habitual tone of a place where Voltaire had his free entry and no doubt gave free expression to all his sallies of wit, but where Fontenelle was appreciated; that was not the tone of Mlle. Le Couvreur's suppers. Of Fontenelle she has left a charming portrait which gives at least as good a picture of herself as of the philosopher she could so well appreciate.

'Obscure persons, writes Mlle. Le Couvreur, do too little honour to those they speak of, for me to dare to publish what I think of M. de Fontenelle; but I cannot deny myself the secret pleasure of painting him here as he appears to me.

'His physiognomy at once proclaims his intellect: an air of the world, pervading his whole person, makes him agreeable in all his actions.

'The charms of the mind often exclude its essential qualities. Unique of his kind, he combines all that commands love and respect; probity, uprightness, equity, make up his character. A lively and brilliant imagination, subtle and delicate turns, novel and ever happy expressions, form its ornament. A pure heart, clean actions, uniform conduct, and principles in every-

thing; exacting little, justifying all, always choosing the good renouncing the bad so strongly that one might doubt if he has perceived it. . . . Difficult to win, but more difficult to lose. Exact in friendship, scrupulous in love: the honest man is nowhere neglected. Equal to the most delicate transactions, although the delight of the learned; modest in his speech, simple in his actions, the superiority of his merit shows itself, but he never openly parades it . . .'

We find here that excellent and moderate language, which I have more than once tried to characterize, the language of the early eighteenth century, remarkable above all for its turn, its correctness and clearness, the language according to Mme. de Maintenon, which every intelligent woman henceforth is able to write, the language of Mme. de Caylus, of Mlle. Aïssé, of Mme. de Staal. Mlle. Le Couvreur's particular taste unconsciously reveals itself in this portrait, and we feel what qualities she especially prizes and desires in the men of her intimacy. *Difficult to win, but more difficult to lose:* that is the real motto of friendship, and that is a merit which the great heart of Adrienne Le Couvreur placed far above rapidly formed fancies and transitory passions. In some unpublished letters written by her to a friend whose name is not known, I find some words which confirm this habitual and sincere feeling in her. This friend had suddenly departed without telling her or writing; she gracefully complains of this neglect: must one be so particular before sitting down to write a letter of friendship?

'I will, she wrote to him, tell you of my principles. When it is a question of writing to my friends, it never occurs to me that I need wit to answer them: my heart suffices for all. I consult it, and then I act; and I have always found this the best policy. One takes me as I am, or one leaves me. All the art that I know, is not to throw myself at their head, whatever my feelings may be. I seek in the first place probity even in my weakest liaisons. When to this is added grace, I can be sensible of it, nature having given me an admirable instinct for discerning it. Experience of the world, time and a little reason have convinced me that such indulgence is necessary in life; but those who have least need of it lose nothing with me: I give them, in place of it, quite as much esteem and admiration as they appear to deserve. And when they honour me with a little kindness, you may well understand what gratitude can add to such feelings, and certainly I was never ungrateful . . .'

At the same time that she desires friendship, she rather dreads it when it becomes enthusiastic; she is always afraid some other sentiment might steal in, and she speaks of it in a tone to convince one seriously that she wishes to abide by the former sentiment :—

'I belong, she says, 'to a sex and profession in which one does not readily suspect this honest feeling, the only one I desire, the only one which flatters me, and of which I dare to think myself worthy by the way in which I feel it; I will even add, by the way, in which I have inspired it more than once in others'.

Though at an age when it is a woman's fault if she does not still appear young, she is not afraid of speaking of the advancing years and of the least pleasing things they bring with them, attentions, duties which, in *ten years*, one will be obliged to pay to an *old friend*. She thinks one should keep all this before one's eyes in good time, that one should become accustomed to the idea, and she is the first to propose it to you frankly: 'Let us go roundly, she says, towards friendship'. A great preservative she has against any new inclination, is that she is deeply in love, that her heart is occupied, that she trembles for an absent one who is running risks, that she impatiently expects the return of somebody :—

'A long expected person, she wrote on October 23, 1728, is at last coming this evening, to all appearances in pretty good health. A courier has just preceded him, because the berline has broken down thirty leagues away. A chaise has been sent off, and this evening *some one* will be here'.

It is not difficult to imagine who this much expected person was: at this date the Comte de Saxe was returning to Paris from one of his journeys to Courland.

The last year of Mlle. Le Couvreur's life was troubled by a strange adventure which lent authority to the poison rumour. I will try to extricate the account of this story from the popular rumours which are mixed up with it, and which one may read in the *Letters* of Mlle. Aïssé and the *Journal* of the advocate Barbier. About the month of July, 1729, a little hunchback abbé and miniature painter, the Abbé Bouret, son of one of the Royal surveyors at Metz, called twice at Mlle. Le Couvreur's house,

and not finding her at home, left a letter in which he said he had some important things to reveal to her, and that, if she desired to know more, she was to come next day into a solitary avenue of the Luxembourg which he indicated; that there she would recognize him by his tapping his hat three times, and she might learn all. Mlle. Le Couvreur, after taking counsel with her friends, betook herself to the spot indicated with a companion. She found the little hunchback, who told her in substance that a lady of the Court whose miniature he was painting had proposed that he should introduce himself to Mlle. Le Couvreur as a painter, and give her a philter which would estrange the Comte de Saxe; that thereupon two masked persons, with whom he had negotiated about the details of the execution, had declared to him that it was not a philter, but a poison that was intended; that to this effect they would on a certain day deposit in a yew-tree in the Tuileries some poisoned pastilles; that the Abbé should fetch them, and if he gave them to Mlle. Le Couvreur, he was assured of a pension of six hundred livres and a sum of six thousand livres. The Abbé added that he pretended to assent to the whole plan, and that he was come to ask what he should do.

Mlle. Le Couvreur did not at first think this story as improbable as it appears to us to-day. The Comte de Saxe was not by nature very faithful, though sincerely attached to her. He had for some time been trying to push himself into the good graces of the Duchesse de Bouillon without success. He was taken with a strong fancy for a singer at the Opera. Mlle. Le Couvreur had a vague idea that she might have something to fear from the side of the Bouillon mansion, or the Opera. The Abbé confirmed her apprehensions by indicating the Bouillon mansion as the place from which the danger came. She therefore made a second appointment with the Abbé, consulted her friends, and the Comte de Saxe himself; it was decided that the Abbé should pretend to lend himself to the whole plot and go to fetch the pastilles in the Tuileries. It was done as decided. The Abbé got the pastilles, and delivered them; they were taken to the Lieutenant-General of Police, M. Hérault. The Abbé Bouret was arrested at the first moment, the pastilles were analysed. The analysis, made by Geoffroy,

of the Academy of Sciences, gave no decisive result. I have before me the official report, dated July 30, 1729. Some of the pastilles seemed doubtful; but the quantity was not sufficient, said the chemist, to permit the experiments to be authoritative and to ground an opinion upon. Meanwhile the affair suddenly became known, and the rumour went about that the Duchesse de Bouillon had tried to poison Mlle. Le Couvreur. The Abbé Aunillon du Gué de Launay, a friend of the Bouillons, in the Memoirs he has left, which are more interesting than known, tells us that he was the first to inform the Duchess of this odious rumour, in order that she might refute it. He describes in natural terms the astonishment and grief she testified at this first news. This Duchesse de Bouillon, we may remark in passing, was not by any means the Princess of that name, née Sobieska, who figures in the play at the Théâtre-Français, but the young mother-in-law of the latter, of the house of Lorraine. The Duc de Bouillon was instantly informed; the whole family was in a state of emotion. They sent for the Lieutenant of Police; they reprimanded him for not having carried the business through at the first alarm, and for having released the Abbé Bouret. The latter was re-arrested and confined in Saint-Lazare. He was interrogated and persisted in his first declaration. Mlle. Le Couvreur, touched by the arrest of a man who had perhaps wished to dupe her and get into her good graces, but who perhaps also had desired sincerely to serve her, wrote to the Lieutenant of Police a letter full of dignity and humanity:—

'I have spoken with him and made him speak frequently and at length, she said of this young man, and he always answered connectedly and ingenuously. It is not that I wish that he is speaking truth; I have a hundred times more reasons for wishing that he is crazy. Ah! would to God that it were only necessary to solicit his pardon! But, if he is innocent, think, Sir, what an interest I must take in his life, and how cruel this uncertainty is for me. Do not regard my profession nor my birth, but deign to see my soul, which is sincere and laid bare in this letter . . .'

Things remained for some months at this stage. The Abbé Bouret, detained at Saint-Lazare, persisted in his statement. The family of the Bouillons pressed or appeared to press for a solution, when suddenly Mlle. Le

Couvreur, whose health for the last year had been very poor, after playing *Jocaste* in *Œdipe* and *Hortense* in *Le Florentin* on Wednesday, March 15, 1730, was carried away by a violent inflammation of the bowels on Monday the 20th. This sudden death revived the rumours with regard to the poison, though it was certainly very unlikely that the persons suspected for some months would have chosen this moment to renew the attempt, even supposing them capable of doing so. The death was more naturally explained by a dose of ipecacuanha taken at an unfortunate moment. The official report of the post-mortem examination exists; it only points to the results of the most acute inflammation. Voltaire, who was present, and in whose arms Adrienne expired, says that all the rumours which circulated were without foundation, and his testimony would be decisive if we did not know that he is systematically opposed to all idea of poison.

To finish with this delicate and obscure point, after the death of Mlle. Le Couvreur, they obtained, on August 24, 1730, from the Abbé Bouret, still in confinement at Saint-Lazare, a pure and simple withdrawal of his first depositions, and a sort of discharge in favour of the Duchesse de Bouillon's innocence. But this declaration, evidently dictated by necessity to the unfortunate man, who at the end puts it all down to his *confused brain*, would be of little value, if one of the friends of the Duchess, but a man of honour, the Abbé Aunillon already mentioned, had not given us another explanation. The Abbé Aunillon thinks that another lady of the Court whom he is thinking of but does not mention, a person of consideration, jealous and no doubt a rival of the Duchesse de Bouillon, and at least as powerful as she, had set the whole machine in motion, not to poison Mlle. Le Couvreur, but to ruin the reputation of the unhappy Duchess whose name had been borrowed. He adds that when the latter was on her death-bed, seven years after, she made aloud, in presence of her friends and her whole household, a general confession of all her faults, all her errings (and they were many), and that she still protested her entire innocence in this matter of Mlle. Le Couvreur.

Everything united at the same moment to excite and inflame the public interest around the bier of the so beloved actress. The Curé of Saint-Sulpice, Languet, refused to

receive her in consecrated ground. She had left a considerable legacy to the poor in her parish: 'Set your mind at rest, she said on the day of her death to a vicar who came to see her; I know what brings you, Monsieur l'Abbé; I have not forgotten your poor in my will'. One adds, it is true, that, turning to a bust of the Comte de Saxe, she exclaimed:—

'Voilà mon univers, mon espoir et mes dieux'!

M. de Maurepas wrote to the Lieutenant of Police that it was not the intention of the Cardinal de Fleury to meddle with this affair of ecclesiastical burial, but to leave it to the decision of the Archbishop of Paris and the Curé of Saint-Sulpice: 'If they persist in refusing it her, as appears to be the case, he wrote, she will have to be removed in the night and interred with the least possible scandal'. So the body was removed by night in a hired coach; two porters, guided by a single friend, M. de Laubinière, went and buried her in a deserted timber-yard in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, near the present south-west angle of the Rue de Grenelle and the Rue de Bourgogne. The faithful d'Argental, appointed residuary legatee, did not think to compromise his character as a magistrate by accepting this mission of trust, and public opinion honours him for it. This legacy was in reality only a trust: Mlle. Le Couvreur left two daughters to be provided for.

Voltaire had one of those flights of grief and sensibility which he was so capable of, and uttered the touching lines which one knows by heart:—

Sitôt qu'elle n'est plus, elle est donc criminelle!
Elle a charmé le monde et vous l'en punissez. . . .

But I will not here expatiate too much, for fear of falling into a declamatory tone, in speaking of one whose chief merit, on the stage as in real life, was to be truth, nature, the very opposite of declamation. These simple words sum up the character of Mlle. Le Couvreur. On hearing the other day the interesting drama in which the struggle of talent and true feeling with prejudice and social pride is so vividly represented under her name, I reflected how much things have changed within the last century, how little the higher society deserves the same reproaches, in this respect at least, and how little behindhand they

are in admiration and in delicate actions towards every superior talent. Most certainly the great actress in whom Mlle. Le Couvreur has been personified, when reciting certain passages which have so little application to-day, felt this with the perfect tact which distinguishes her, and thought it much better than I do.

FATHER LACORDAIRE AS AN ORATOR

Monday, December 31, 1849.

A SHORT time ago I was speaking of M. de Montalembert, regarding him from the point of view of talent: to-day I would like to discuss, under the same heading, another orator, not less eloquent, though in a different direction, who also diverged from the narrow path of the School, and who, for the last fourteen years already, has been making for himself a singular, original, brilliant place in the pulpit. Pulpit eloquence has not been without its reflorescence in our days, and we could mention a few modern names which honourably sustain the traditions of the past: M. Lacordaire is rather one of those who set off and enhance tradition than of those who sustain it. Among those orators of the modern pulpit, some of whom, one of whom at least (M. de Ravignon), might vie with him in real warmth, in sympathy and unction, there is not one who, in boldness of views and flight of ideas, by the novelty and often the happiness of his expression, by the vivacity and unexpectedness of his movements, by the brilliancy and ardour of his speech, by the imagination and even the poetry which mingle with it, can compare with Father Lacordaire. Of the preachers of our day he is assuredly the one who, in the eyes of those who observe and admire still more than they believe, shows himself at the highest level of talent. I will try to indicate here some of the characteristic features of his manner.

I formerly had the honour of knowing the Abbé Lacordaire well; I have never seen or heard him again since then without being touched with his language, and penetrated by his accent. To-day I would like to reconcile all that I owe to those memories and to the feelings of respect I have devoted to him, with the independence of the critic—at least of the literary critic; for here, when

speaking of those men who lend themselves to study from so many different aspects, I am and wish to be nothing more.

There exists an accurate and very well written account of M. Lacordaire, by one of the friends of his childhood, M. Lorain; I have no intention to add to or supplement it. I will only say that he was born in May, 1802, in the market town of Recey-sur-Ource (Côte-d'Or), five leagues from Châtillon-sur-Seine. His father, a physician, had settled there after having been through a campaign in the American war under Rochambeau; a good and honourable man, he left memories in the district which the forty years which have since elapsed have hardly effaced. His mother, of a Dijon family, daughter of a Clerk in the Parliament of Burgundy, was one of those strong simple women who are equal to all their duties. She had four sons, and lost her husband when she was pregnant with the fourth. These four sons are alive. The youngest is a captain in the cavalry, another is an architect and engineer. The eldest, who has written for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, has been for some years Professor of Natural History at the University of Liège; he has made four voyages to South America, and is in the front rank among the most distinguished entomologists of our time, a clear intellect, a patient investigator, an accurate and severe observer. The second of the four sons was the future Dominican. I did not wish to pass over these early particulars; for it is not a matter of indifference, in my opinion, even for one's future convictions and beliefs, to be born of a strong and healthy race, a pure and blameless race. When an uncommon talent chances to find so firm and clearly traced a foundation of hereditary organization and to come to light, when a great gift of glory chances to flash out when eloquence, for example, the speech of fire descends, it finds a support and a frame: it is like the incense which has its altar already built, it is like the holocaust which is kindled on the rock.

Young Henri Lacordaire attended school at the Lycée of Dijon, from 1810 to 1819. In that home of Bossuet, within sight of the hill where St. Bernard was born, he did not then dream that he would one day have something in common with those great names, and that he would compete for a rank among their descendants. Only, with-

out giving himself too much trouble, he carried off all the prizes at the end of the year; he had his tragedy on the stocks, like every good *rhétoricien*; he acted scenes from the *Iphigénie* with one of his comrades, now Professor of Law at Dijon, both of them (Achilles and Agamemnon) in the uniform of infantry privates, and attacking their parts in good earnest. The patriotic sentiment was very strong in him; he painfully felt the wounds of France and the disasters which marked the fall of the Empire. As a law student, still at Dijon, he began to distinguish himself by a real talent for speech in the debates which the students and young barristers had started among themselves. With all this he wrote poems, some of them even, they say, rather amusing.

His law studies completed, he went to Paris to keep his terms, about 1822. He began to plead, and with success. But, although he mastered this ungrateful matter, it did not satisfy him. His eloquence benefited by the practice and drill; but it found no room for stretching and unfolding its wings. He suffered from the malady of the time, the malady of the young men of that day; he would weep without cause like René; he would say: *I am sick of everything without having known anything.* His suppressed energy stifled him. 'At twenty-five, he has remarked, a generous soul only seeks to sacrifice its life. It asks of Heaven and earth only a great cause to serve with a great devotion; love and strength are superabundant.' He was at that time a Voltairean like his generation, a Deist, not sceptical nor indifferent, mark it well: even when he did not believe, the form of his thought was always clear-cut. He was of that race of minds made for certainty, to believe or at least to form conclusions, of those upright, firm and decided spirits, which aim at results. I do not think I err when I say that such is the primitive form of mind in his family. He joined to it a quite young heart, preserved in its freshness and fullness, a heart which had not spent its treasure, a powerful faculty of ardent speech and an inspiration which sought an outlet and did not find it. Nothing that surrounded him satisfied him. In his little chamber of a *stagiaire* advocate, he was ostensibly occupied in drawing up memoranda and examining briefs, but he lived in the tempest of the spirit. It was then, about 1824, that a great and sudden revolution

took place within him ; his friends, his family suddenly heard that he was giving up the bar, that he had entered Saint-Sulpice.

Those conversions which appear to be sudden are always preceded by inner movements which prepare them. For some time M. Lacordaire had reasoned within himself as follows: Society, in my eyes, is necessary; besides, Christianity is necessary to society; it alone is qualified to maintain and perfect it: therefore Christianity is true, not with a political and relative truth, as many people admit. but with a higher and divine truth: every other subordinate truth would be a compromise and a sort of misapprehension unworthy both of the confidence of man and the sincerity of God. Thus he was led back to the Christian beliefs through his social beliefs, and his intellect took the first step. But the soaring of his heart which sought food, and, unconsciously, the soaring of his talent which sought a career, did the rest and shortened the road.

He has described with charm the peace, the kind of rejuvenescence which one experiences during the first days after quitting the world and entering the Seminary, where one recovers the childhood of the heart, the docility of one's young years, the austere rule, all simple things of which one is reflectively conscious and comfortably sensible of deserving. I could quote some charming, poetic pages which he wrote on the subject to a friend and placed in a book where one would hardly think of seeking them. But I must come to the main thing. Under his new habit he preserved the love of liberty which he had imbibed since his childhood from the atmosphere of the age, and which he has never since separated from the vital idea of Christianity.

He gave evidence of this feeling from the moment he began to appear before the public: it was by the side of M. de Lamennais, on the morrow of 1830. He believed that the work which M. de Lamennais was then attempting in the *Avenir* paper, was of a general and decisive interest for the time. Hitherto, one had been accustomed to confound the idea of the Catholic religion with the idea of political power and the Legitimate line of monarchy. The Restoration had done everything to establish that confusion in men's minds. A man was a Catholic and a Royalist by the same train of opinion, almost by

virtue of the same ideas and the same interests. This confusion seemed most unfortunate to the Abbé Lacordaire; it appeared to him a disparagement and a degradation of Christianity, and he thought it was well to show France at length that one could be faithful to Jesus Christ without being enfeoffed to the fallen throne, though it was the throne of the descendants of St. Louis. One may say that, summing it up in this idea, the work undertaken in 1831 by M. de Lamennais and his disciples of that time, even though so soon interrupted, was not quite a failure, and that indeed, from that time, the young generation of men have been able to convince themselves that adhesion to a religious symbol did not necessarily imply adhesion to a political form. There have never been, in a word, any Catholics who were evidently less Legitimist than M. de Montalembert and the Abbé Lacordaire.

When on his trial before the Chamber of Peers for opening a Free School (September, 1831), the Abbé Lacordaire spoke in his defence. He was one of the three accused who had tried to anticipate the promises of the Charter of 1830, and had opened a school at their own risk and peril, without submitting themselves to the University decrees then in force. The Attorney-General Persil supported the accusation; it was the Abbé Lacordaire who replied to him with a vigorous and quite improvised discussion, in which one recognized the barrister, but a barrister already armed with the sword of the Levite.

When the publication of the *Avenir*, in which talent and generosity were so mingled with acts of imprudence and temerity, had provoked the Holy See to a sentence of disapproval, all the contributors submitted at the first instant; but whilst the indignant master submitted with a murmur, with an impatient submission which did not endure, M. Lacordaire resigned himself simply and sincerely, resolved to obey to the end.

Meanwhile, he had reached the age of thirty; his efforts had been hitherto only tentative, and he had not found his true path. He obtained more than a glimpse of it, however, in the Conferences he preached in 1834 at the Collège Stanislas, where his young audience were astonished to hear for the first time in the pulpit a language as young and vigorous as themselves, easy and bold, approaching new ideas by their real names, often adopting their

colour and tone in order to attack them more closely and to reconnect them by their sound parts to the antique traditions, which seemed quite rejuvenated by them. These addresses frightened the authorities, but this time it was the political authorities, the University authorities. There is something in M. Lacordaire's eloquence which easily frightens one, if one isolates a few of its features, and listens only to certain fragments of it. It is by the help of these very qualities, which some would call defects, that he succeeds so much better with young men.

At last, the benevolence of the Archbishop of Paris, M. de Quélen, who had the merit, by an honourable discernment coming from the heart rather than from the head, to appreciate the talent in him and the candour in that talent, opened to M. Lacordaire in 1835 the pulpit of Notre-Dame, the first pulpit in the capital. From the outset, this man to whom it was almost a natural vocation to preach to the youth of the nineteenth century, that youth to which he had belonged and to which, by his accent, he will never cease to belong, felt himself in his whole element. His eloquence, like those high-flying birds which feel at ease only in space and vastness, had found its sphere.

The Abbé Lacordaire's Conferences have a character which connects them with nothing in that kind that is reputed classical, but which is singularly appropriate to the audiences of this time. At the most we might find in the fragments of eloquence which are known to us of Father Bridaine or Father Guénard some precedents, but even these would offer only untrustworthy analogies. We must acknowledge then that the Abbé Lacordaire's form is new, and even *romantic* if one pleases: it is not for us to have the right to regard that word as an insult. Men of high talent, M. de Chateaubriand, M. de Maistre, M. de Lamennais (I only choose them on account of their most general resemblances), the one through the incense of poetry, the others by the brilliant temerity of their interpretations, had resuscitated Christianity for the generations of the century, and presented it under forms which were certainly not those to which Fleury, Massillon and Bourdaloue had accustomed us. This bold and brilliant school had not hitherto raised up its preacher, and it is in the Abbé Lacordaire that we meet with him.

'The Church, he said, speaking of the times of confusion and disorder which resembled our own, the Church then calls to her aid an eloquence which it would be difficult to define by constant characters, by reason of the variety of errors she has to combat and of souls she has to convince, but which one might call external or apostolic preaching'. It is the part of the apostle indeed to convert infidels and unbelievers, and in the nineteenth century we are all more or less infidels and unbelievers. 'The old serpent of error, he says again, changes its colours in the sunlight of every century. So, whilst the preaching of morals hardly undergoes any changes except those of style, instructive and controversial preaching, supple as ignorance, subtle as error, must imitate their powerful versatility, and drive them, with ever renewed weapons, into the arms of immutable truth'. He was not, then, contented with retempering his arms in the stream of doctrine, he has repolished them in the air of the century, and they shine in his hands with a quite new, sometimes a dazzling brilliancy. 'It is not a question of following the rules of rhetoric, but of making God known and beloved; let us have the faith of St. Paul, he adds, and speak Greek as badly as he'. Here, however, do not take him at his word. If he frees himself from the fetters of rhetoric, it is in virtue of a superior principle of rhetoric; and, to follow his comparison, he does not speak *Greek* any worse than his predecessors, he speaks it differently. Or rather, putting aside metaphors, he speaks the French of the nineteenth century to young men of the nineteenth century, to those whose crowded heads he sees below him in the immense nave of Notre-Dame, and to whom he says: 'You who come to hear the divine word with a swelling heart and as judges'! To these judges of twenty he speaks their own language, he knows their images, he makes their poetry visible to them for moments. Certainly, to him who reads in cold blood these Conferences on the Church and her constitution, on her infallibility, etc., the argument is often weak, the logic appears full of gaps, and, in such a matter, it is not surprising at the present date if a few links are wanting in the chain of reasoning. M. Lacordaire steps over rather than fills up the intervening spaces. Often the orator plays upon his words; he creates definitions, and then

concludes from them the very things that ought to be proved. He pays himself with picturesque comparisons and subtle abstractions. He composes for himself a history by guess-work, as the crow flies, as the eye of Providence might do. His too strong imagination brings together facts that differ, which a thousand circumstances keep separate and distinct; it gathers them to its focus as under a burning glass, until a flame appears. Those are the defects, which I could if necessary discuss in detail and illustrate by examples. But what does it matter to the believing orator, as long as, by means of this same process, his audiences comprehend him better and grant him more, as long as he himself feels that his words are entering and penetrating! As I have said, the Abbé Lacordaire to a certain degree belongs to his century, and he acknowledges it with a touching grace: 'God prepared us for this task by allowing us to live long years in oblivion of his love, carried along those same paths which he intended us some day to retrace in the opposite direction. So that, in order to speak as we have done, we needed only a little memory and a little ear, to abide in our distant past, in unison with a century of which we had loved everything'. This knowledge of the century and its weaknesses procures him an easy alliance with the imaginations and the hearts of his young public. 'God, he says, in one place, gave to his Church charity. With charity there was no heart which the Church could not penetrate; for misfortune is king of this world, and, sooner or later every heart is touched by his sceptre. . . . Henceforth the Church could go confidently to conquer the universe, for there are tears in the whole universe, and they are so natural to us, that even without cause they would flow unceasingly, through the mere charm of that indefinable sorrow of which our soul is the deep and mysterious well'. The Abbé Lacordaire's eloquence is quite full of these effusions of sensibility which resemble confessions, and after which those who hear them offer less resistance to his reasons. And then, what he desires is not so much to convert at one blow, but to shake, to stir his hearers, make them render testimony, to extract a *note*: 'As soon as a soul, he says, gives forth in the century the note of eternity, as soon as it testifies in favour of the Christ and his Church, let us not show ourselves

more rigorous than He who said: *He that is not against you is with you* '. Thanks to this tone of generous accommodation and sincerity, he succeeded in winning over his audience of young men an authority of favour and sympathy; he was able to give them moral advice on the most delicate subjects: on *chastity*, for example, he delivered some addresses which might appear singularly bold, if this boldness were not clothed in so much candour and served up with such prodigious talent. With him one often ventures on dangerous places in expression; but one is soon reassured, when one has become accustomed to them. One feels so well the presence of a power which, from the height of that pulpit, is in the sincerity of its direction and in the plenitude of its nature, of an eloquence which believes it has received its watch-word from above: 'Do not consult the course of rivers nor the direction of mountains, go straight before you; go as goes the lightning from Him who sends you, as went the creative word which carried life into chaos, as fly the eagles and the angels'. He goes, then, and often carries us along over crests and peaks; one shudders, but he does not fall. Sometimes he himself stops as if amazed at the temerity of his words; but he resumes them, he retrieves them at once, or simply he redoubles, explains them; for everything in him issues from a clean heart, an ardent and pure lip.

Three great names of preachers are the glory of the French pulpit: Bossuet, Bourdaloue and Massillon. Bossuet's *Sermons* were only appreciated after they were printed, and, in his lifetime, they were lost as it were in the rest of his fame. Bourdaloue and Massillon were in their time the masters of the pulpit in the kind of discourse called *sermon*. Massillon, whose rich developments, whose learned, ingenious but already rather prolix and rather nerveless eloquence is known to all, is the more pleasing of the two to the modern reader. It is Bourdaloue, however, who, by his just proportions, by the beauty of his arrangement and the accuracy of his developments, represents the mean and complete perfection in this serious kind of discourse, at its best moment. But to-day, when we read Bourdaloue (if we must be sincere), with all his sound and solid qualities, which are, however, never relieved by the invention of details and the bloom of expression.

he wearies us. Somebody said of Bourdaloue that he was an eloquent Nicole. I will say also: He is the Despréaux of the pulpit; but a prose Despréaux, whose inherent and sedate qualities, divorced from accent and action, have preserved no vivacity, no freshness. However, when one takes the trouble of studying him, one finds the most sterling merits. What is wanting in the Abbé Lacordaire's eloquence, is just what Bourdaloue's has in excess. There is nothing whatever of Bourdaloue in him, that is to say of that even, moderate steadiness, always satisfying on reflexion, always judicious (the dogma once admitted). But I have said that Bourdaloue wearies, if read to-day; and he, the other, carries us away, he astonishes, he conquers, or at least he deals blows which one remembers. He has a clarion in his voice, and the flash of the sword in his speech. He possesses the militant eloquence appropriate to generations who have had Chateaubriand for their catechist, and have been evangelized by Jocelyn after René.

The Abbé Lacordaire had had two years of success at Notre-Dame, when he took a step which must have seemed strange and extreme to his friends, even the most religious; he suddenly left that position which he had made for himself and went to Rome to study, so it was said, but really to prepare himself for assuming the habit of a Dominican, and to return from thence in the white gown of the preaching friar. What had taken place within him?

In his conduct as in his eloquence the Abbé Lacordaire has those unexpected turns, those bold flights, those sudden illuminations as we should call them in an army general. By carefully listening to him, one might however know the reasons. No sooner was he established in that pulpit of Notre-Dame, when he did not fail to become aware of his powerful influence on the public; he felt that he was in a good way of doing a work and, as he hoped, a blessed work. He desired more. With that lofty moral ambition which he confesses and which aims at winning for what he believes the truth the greatest possible number of hearts and minds, he said to himself: 'My word is useful; why should it not be perpetual? But for that it needs a body, an Order; now, this Order is ready found, it exists; it only needs resuscitating in France'. Still, at first sight the enterprise was a

strange one. In becoming a Dominican, he no doubt sharply separated himself from the Jesuits, who are the rival and adverse Order; but he did not come any nearer to popular favour. What! go and choose for his patron the very man to whom was ascribed the establishment of the Inquisition, the Crusade against the Albigenses! He was doing, then, a very risky thing, from the point of view of human prudence; and, from his own point of view, he never did, he says, a greater act of faith.

This holy venture turned out a success. Meanwhile, whilst he was carrying it through, he did not omit to clear up the historical question, and began by disentangling it from the declamations which the echoes of the eighteenth century had swelled. He wrote a *Mémoire* for the re-establishment in France of the Order of Preaching Friars, which he dedicated on the first page *To my country;* he wrote a *Life* of St. Dominic, which might lend itself to discussion historically, but in which breathes and shines the keen intelligence of the Middle Age. In the interval he had gone to preach at Metz, a warlike and patriotic city, and had kindled the enthusiasm of the military youth. He reappeared in the pulpit of Notre-Dame on February 14, 1841, and found there the old sympathies, increased by a novel curiosity. I do not know if he will succeed in his attempt to revive the Order; but at least the white gown of the Dominican did him no harm, as was to be perceived on the very first day. Evidently his person, his talent, the interest which attached to them, did not lose by the change, and the disposition was henceforth rather to overlook any extraordinary conduct.

I am not retracing his life, and will confine myself to the applications of his eloquence. I have pointed out a few of its defects; I would like now to consider it in one of the compositions in which it appears to me most free from reproach, entirely simple, pathetic and novel at the same time; I would like to be able to say without reserve: *That is beautiful!* The Funeral Oration on General Drouot, delivered in the cathedral of Nancy on May 25, 1847, gives me this joy. That Funeral Oration appears to me a master-piece in the order of modern productions. It may be read after the Funeral Oration on Condé and that on Turenne; and if Bossuet, as one may believe, remains incomparable and great by all his height, how

preferable the Abbé Lacordaire's work appears to-day from certain sides to that of Fléchier! M. Lacordaire has so far had three Funeral Orations to deliver, that on O'Connell, that on the Bishop of Nancy, M. Forbin-Janson, and lastly that on General Drouot; I have arranged them not in order of dates, but according to their merits. The first, that on O'Connell, I like little; it is not exempt from the declamation peculiar to the present day. Every age has its idolatries; that of the age of Louis XIV was royalty, that of ours is popularity. The sacred orator has bowed down to it too much in the person of the great agitator, who never, to attain his ends, was sparing of lies and invectives. The second Funeral Oration, that on M. de Janson, is much superior, it is simple and true. In speaking of that excellent man, mediocre in everything except heart, who was a zealous missionary and a rather poor bishop, the orator found touching accents and pathetic movements. Under the figure of the Abbé de Janson, he unconsciously depicted some of the features of his own nature, of his own spiritual ambition as an apostle: 'Apostleship, he said, which was his true, his only vocation, stirred and impelled him from the very beginning of his priesthood'. It was the end of the Empire: M. de Janson was seeking a career for his zeal, a field in which to sow his word, and not daring to think of France, then mute, he wandered in imagination from America to China, from China to the banks of the Ganges:—

'Suddenly, in the very heart of our country, continues the orator, a great cry rises up: the descendant of Cyrus and Cæsar, the master of the world, had fled before his enemies; the Imperial eagles, brought back in full flight from the banks of the Dnieper and the Vistula, were returning to their native country to defend it and were astonished at gathering in their powerful claws only victories wounded to the death. God, but God alone, had vanquished France, commanded to the very last by genius, and still triumphant in the very quarter of an hour which signalized her fall. I will not tell the cause of this catastrophe; besides that they are not of my province, it is repugnant to a son of the country to probe too deeply the national grief, and he willingly leaves to time alone the care of explaining the lessons which God himself has put into these reverses'.

This feeling of patriotism is one of the sources of the Abbe Lacordaire's eloquence. Observe that it does not

come to him by accident merely or for the sake of effect; the hearth of it is within him. To hear this Dominican of our times, we might sometimes think we had recovered the poet who said of his country:—

J'ai des chants pour toutes ses gloires,
Des larmes pour tous ses malheurs.

It is not for us to dispute this sentiment here, and to consider whether he does not introduce into the sacred word, in the midst of so much emotion and brilliancy, a little trickery. But certainly, if this sentiment had anywhere its lawful place, if the orator was justified in displaying it, it was in the Eulogy of General Drouot, that faithful lieutenant, a rare, simple, thoroughly patriotic man, who was probity itself in the camps, whom Napoleon called the *Sage of the Grand Army*, and who at the close of the great battles, asked of Heaven no other favour but to return to die in the parish where he had received baptism. The details which the orator has given us of his simple childhood, are impregnated with a perfume of domestic virtue which goes to the heart. Drouot was the son of a baker at Nancy, the third of twelve children:—

'Risen from the people, the child of Christian parents, he early witnessed, in the paternal home, a spectacle which did not permit him to know envy of another's lot, nor desire for high birth; he there saw order, peace, contentment, a kindness which could share with the poorest, a faith which, resigned in all things to God, raised everything to him, simplicity, generosity, nobility of soul, and he learned, from the happiness he himself enjoyed in a condition esteemed so vulgar, that everything becomes good for man when he depends on his labour for a living and on his religion for his greatness. Never was the memory of these early times blotted out from the thoughts of General Drouot; in the glorious smoke of battles, at the very side of the man who kept all Europe on the alert, he would return through the imagination of his heart and with a feeling of gratitude, to the humble roof that had sheltered, with the virtues of his father and mother, the happiness of his own infancy. Shortly before his death, comparing together all the phases of his career, he wrote: "I have known real happiness in obscurity, the inno cence and poverty of my early years". Since such was the charm which recalled the hero to his own beginnings, let us approach nearer, and seek in the few existing memories, what there was so pleasing in this childhood still so dear'.

And here the orator enters into a few familiar details to which the classical Funeral Oration (except Bossuet's at times) had hardly accustomed us :—

'Young Drouot felt himself impelled by a very precocious instinct to the study of Letters. At the age of three he knocked at the doors of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and as they refused him admission on account of his tender years, he wept bitterly. He was received at last. His parents, witnessing his quite spontaneous diligence, allowed him, as he advanced in years, to attend higher classes, but without sparing him any of the duties and hardships of home. On returning from school or college, he had to carry bread to customers, live in the common room with all the family, where his ears and mind suffered the discomforts of a perpetual distraction. At an early hour of the evening the lamps were extinguished for economy, and the poor scholar made the best of the circumstances, happy when the moon's greater brilliancy prolonged his evening. He eagerly profited by these rare occasions. At two o'clock in the morning, sometimes earlier, he was up ; at that hour the work of the house recommenced by the light of a single wretched lamp. He too resumed his labours ; but soon again the faithless lamp failed him, going out before the day appeared ; then he would approach the open, flaming oven and continue, by this rude sunlight, his reading of Livy or Cæsar.

'Such was this childhood, whose memory pursued General Drouot even into the splendours of the Tuileries. You will be astonished perhaps ; you will wonder what charm he found in that. He has told you himself : it was the charm of obscurity, of innocence and poverty. He grew up under the three-fold guardianship of these strong virtues ; he grew up like a son of Sparta and Rome, or to speak better and more truly, he grew up like a Christian child, in whom the beauty of naturalness and the effusion of the divine Grace form a mysterious feast which the heart that has known it can never forget'.

Here I indicate the simple, touching parts : the great movements of eloquence appropriately mingle with them. All is said in a clear, charming manner ; all is felt. I regret to be unable to quote another admirable and impressive page on the love of Letters. One cannot read this Funeral Oration aloud without a tear, a perpetual tear so to say, moistening one's eye-lid and breaking one's voice.

The February Revolution of 1848 carried Father Lacordaire into the National Assembly ; he might have thought for a moment that in the midst of a great common work

of reconstruction there would be room sometimes for an extra-parliamentary religious word. But, after the invasion of May 15, he resigned his seat, comprehending no doubt that under the blow of such an outrage the house would re-enter the paths of ordinary politics, of methodical social defence, and that there was no longer any chance of attempting, in any direction, to infuse a new spirit. He resumed his independent, elevated rôle, his Conferences, and we saw him with pleasure making his eloquence still more familiar in the homily, in the *prône* (exhortations) which he undertook in the little Church of the Carmelites. These humble instructions have a naturalness, a grace, and with him they never lack elevation. In one of these recent homilies he seemed to breathe some imprudent words directed against the middle-class. I have heard another in which I found none of those sharp tones, but rather a corrective in which everybody had his share. But M. Lacordaire is too experienced not to understand that there is danger even in appearances, even in the wrong interpretations to which his words might lend themselves. When dry straw is scattered about the streets and flies about at the will of the wind, one should heed the smallest sparks, even when they fly from a sacred fire.

I have only very imperfectly succeeded in rendering this singular, original, attractive physiognomy, so un-Gallican and so French, which pleases us even in its temerities, in which naturalness stands out happily in spite of a few extravagances of taste, in which audacity does not compromise some real beauties; this orator in white habit, with his youthful appearance, his vibrating speech, his flaming eyeballs, whose lips, made to open and allow words to flow from them, express both ardour and goodness. I have, however, to finish up, a little quarrel to pick with him. Father Lacordaire is generous, he is generous to his adversaries of every camp. He is generous to the Protestants, for example, and in his Funeral Oration on O'Connell, on the subject of the emancipation of the Catholics, he solemnly thanked them under the rather astonished vaults of Notre-Dame. One day, at the Collège Stanislas, he happened to speak of Saint-Simonism, then quite recent; I remember a sort of prayer, which was also generous. He is generous, in a word, to all who believe in some degree. He has spoken of Luther without

insult, with a sentiment of respect for that rich and powerful nature ; but suddenly, apropos of Luther himself, quoting a witty saying of Erasmus, he added :

'You all know Erasmus, gentlemen. He was, at that time, the foremost Academician in the world. On the eve of tempests which were destined to stir up Europe and the Church he was writing prose with the most consummate elasticity. All over the world people would quarrel over one of his letters. Princes wrote to him with pride. But when the thunder had roared, when men were bound to devote themselves to error or to the truth, to give to one or the other their eloquence, their glory and their blood, this good fellow had the courage to remain an Academician, and was snuffed out at Rotterdam, at the end of a phrase, still elegant, but despised'.

Will he allow me to point out to him here that he is unjust ? Erasmus, elegant writer though he was, was by no means an *Academician* in the sense in which the orator understands it ; he was one of those men who love Letters, but he was not a phrase-monger. You make him out a ridiculous Balzac ; Erasmus was only a moderate Voltaire, a Fontenelle with a sounder literary taste, a precursor of Rabelais without the intoxication, a philosopher who, having come too soon and finding himself between extreme parties, neither of which he could espouse, asked permission to remain neutral. 'Because Erasmus, says Bayle, did not embrace Luther's Reformation and yet condemned many things that were practised by the Papists, he drew upon himself a thousand insults, both from Catholics and Protestants'. Must he still incur the same fate ? I will leave to the great renown of Erasmus the glory of science and the intellect, but I will never cease to revindicate under this name the right of a refined and mitigated good sense, of a reason that regards, that observes, that chooses, that has no wish to appear to believe more than it does believe ; in a word, I will never cease, in the face of arrogant philosophies and even of faith armed with talent, to assert the right, I will not say of the lukewarm, but of neutrals.

PHILIPPE DE COMMYNES[1]

Monday, January 7, 1850.

PHILIPPE DE COMMYNES is in date the first really modern writer. Even those readers who would not care to go back very far, nor throw themselves into erudite curiosity, those who would like to form only a small library of quite modern French books, could not dispense with Montaigne and Commynes. These two men have the same ideas as we have, and they have them in the degree and the sense in which it would be well that we had them, they understand the world, society, particularly the art of living and conducting oneself in the world, as we should be happy to understand it to-day; sane and judicious heads, furnished with shrewd and sure sense, rich with an experience not bitter so much as profitable and comforting, and savoury as it were. They are counsellors and talkers good to listen to now after three or four centuries as on the first day; Montaigne on all subjects and at all hours, Commynes on affairs of state, on the moving springs and the secret of great things, on what would be called after his day modern political interests, on so many motives which guided the men of his time, and continue to guide the men of our time. What appears to be naïveté in them is only a grace and bloom of language which adorns their maturity, and which in our eyes imparts to their experience, consummate as it is, an indefinable air of precocious novelty, which makes it pleasant and piquant, and impresses it upon the reader. One is apt to think of wisdom in white hair and prudence in grey; here, they show themselves rather with a smile, with a young speech full of freshness.

[1] *Memoirs of Philippe de Commynes.* New Edition, published by Mademoiselle Dupont (3 vols. octavo).

The edition I am noticing is a quite natural occasion for reading Commynes, again. This edition published under the auspices of the *Société de l'Histoire de France*, is not only better than that we possessed hitherto, it is the only entirely good one, worthy of being reputed a classic, not only for the text which the editor has restored from a careful comparison of the manuscripts, but also for the proper names of which a great number had been disfigured and had to be restored, for the correct and sober notes which clear up the essential passages, and lastly for the biography of Commynes himself, which for the first time is complete and cleared up in its most important points. Our gratitude is the greater when we think that so many good offices, of which the eminent historian is the object, are due to a woman. The Academy of Inscriptions has recognized this substantial and modest merit by awarding to Mlle. Dupont the first medal in the series of works concerning the antiquities of France. The reader, who will henceforth read Commynes with greater pleasure and ease, will add to it a sentiment of esteem for the excellent editor.

'*Au saillir de l'enfance*, on sallying from childhood, says Commynes (we should now say with less exuberance: *au sortir* de l'enfance), and at an age when I was able to ride, I was taken to Lille before Duke Charles of Burgundy'. Here we see Commynes, aged about seventeen years, setting his foot in the stirrup and entering straightway into the school of the world. He had till now been rather carelessly brought up by a guardian, knew neither Greek nor Latin, which he afterwards regretted; but we do not regret it either for him or for ourselves: it was the easier for him to throw off the pedantic rhetoric of his time. When he wrote his Memoirs in his retirement he addressed them to one of his friends, the Archbishop of Vienne, and he appears to hope that this friend, who had been almoner to Louis XI, and was, besides, a learned physician and astrologer, has only asked him for them in order to put them into Latin and use them as materials for an important work. This hope of Commynes that his book might be turned into Latin, almost sounds like a jest, and might pass for a simple piece of politeness. In any case his story, the less ambitious because he only regarded it in the light of material, has remained the definitive his-

tory of that epoch, a monument of naïveté, of truth and shrewdness; political history in France dates from it.

Before passing into the service of Louis XI, Commynes was attached, then, to the heir of Burgundy, the prince who was afterwards called Charles the Bold. Louis XI, on ascending the throne, had aroused all the distrust of the nobility, who felt instinctively that they had to deal with a prince who was not knightly. These feudal ambitions leagued themselves together and armed themselves; they called it the *League of the Public Good*, and all these great vassals, these lords came to within a few leagues of his capital, to the foot of the hill of Montlhéri, to give battle to the new king (1465). This was the first battle that Commynes witnessed, and the account he gives of it is as piquant as anything can be. Never was a man less the dupe of military display, less taken in by outward show. This army of Burgundy to which he then belongs, and which presents itself with so much pomp and array, appears to him, at close quarters, to be composed of awkward and poorly-armed men, who have rusted in a long peace of thirty years. One guesses that it is in a very advanced state of decay, and that at the first serious shock it will tumble to pieces. About a century before, Froissart, the last of the historians of the Middle Age, and the most brilliant, described the battle of Poitiers (1356) in a narrative that is quite epic and grand. Nothing could be more broadly presented, clearer and more circumstantial than this battle in Froissart, nothing could be more connected in its least important episodes, and at the same time more clearly put before us in its ensemble, and crowned by a quite heroic scene. We can distinctly follow both the general plan as in a modern narrative, and each single duel as in a combat of the *Iliad*. If Commynes in recounting the battle of Montlhéri, had wished to parody that of Poitiers, he could not have set about it differently. The battle, in this case, begins all amiss, quite contrary to the projected plan and to common sense. Charles, posted at Longjumeau, places the Constable of Saint-Pol at Montlhéri, and intends to fight at Longjumeau; Louis XI tries to avoid the battle: it is the contrary that happens. On both sides are traitors, or at least men who keep two strings to their bow, Saint-Pol on the side of Burgundy Brézé on the King's side, and these false

knights figure in the foreground. At the moment when the battle begins before Montlhéri, the Burgundians do the exact opposite of what had been decided in the Council. The King's men were retrenched at the foot of the castle behind a hedge and a ditch; they were to have been dislodged by archers. The archers (corresponding to the infantry of our days) are, according to Commynes, 'the sovereign thing in battles'; but to be that they should be counted by thousands (for in small numbers they are of no use). They should besides be badly mounted so as not to regret the loss of their horses, or better still they should have no horses at all, in order not to be tempted to make use of them. And lastly Commynes, who unravels the true reasons, even in heroism, remarks that the best archers are those who have seen nothing, who have not yet seen the enemy's steel (we should say the enemy's fire), because they do not know the danger. But the Burgundian knights, who have placed the archers in their front, have not the patience to await the effect of this manœuvre, and, carried away by a fine zeal, they send these same archers, 'the flower and hope of their army', head over heels and march over them without giving them a chance to draw a single bow-string. So true it is that 'things do not happen in the fields as they are ordained in the chamber', and that the sense of a single man cannot pretend to order so great a number of people! Commynes concludes that to value oneself to that degree, would be, for a *man who had natural reason*, to overrate oneself and encroach upon God, who intends to show 'that battles are in his hand, and that he disposes of the victory at his pleasure'. Commynes frequently brings God and Heaven into his considerations, and we may sometimes wonder if he does so with entire sincerity, and not in order the better to cover his bold and satiric remarks. But here the thought is elevated, natural, and the same reflexion applies to much bigger battles and more thought-out ones than that. The best of the business for our Burgundians of the fifteenth century is that their foolishness succeeded, a thing which has often happened. The right wing, commanded by Charles, is victorious. Commynes kept all day by his side, 'having less fear, he says, than he ever had in any place where he found himself since'; and he gives the reason for this, lest one might

mistake it: it is that he was young and had no knowledge of danger. Such he appeared at Montlhéri, such he was afterwards at Fornovo and elsewhere, not taking any credit upon himself on that score. Full of sang-froid he yet piques himself very little on military heroism, and he is of opinion, like his future master, that 'he who has the profit of the war, has the honour of it'.

Commynes' irony has full play in this first narrative; it is the irony that we seek, and not the affair in itself, which does not much concern us. One wing, we said, was victorious, another is routed. At one moment each side thinks itself beaten. On the King's side there was a great personage who fled at a gallop as far as Lusignan (in Poitou) without reining in; and on the Burgundian side another great personage fled with no less speed to Quesnoi (in Hainaut). *These two*, adds Commynes, *had no desire to bite each other.*

They sleep on the field of battle, which remains in the possession of Charles; Commynes describes this field of battle, as it was in reality, such as they all are,[1] and Charles' supper, seated on a bundle of straw, in the midst of the dead and dying, one of whom wakes up very seasonably to ask for a cooling draught. They spend the night in a deadly fright, thinking themselves lost if the enemy reappears in the morning. The historian's *Te Deum* sounds very like: *We have had a narrow escape*; and the final conclusion he arrives at is that they behaved in this affair *like men, and not like angels.*

One of the strange effects of this amusing victory of Montlhéri, is that it puffs up the heart of Charles to such an extent that, from that day he imagines himself an Alexander, and dreams of nothing but war and conquest (though he had not thought of them before), and that henceforth he will take nobody's advice. During seven consecutive years that he was in the wars at Charles' side, never once did Commynes know him to admit that he was fatigued or show any uncertainty. Such was the prince in whose service he found himself, almost as soon as he returned from this expedition, in the quality of chamberlain and counsellor. He wasted his pains and

[1] Remember the letter of the Marquis d'Argenson to Voltaire, written on the battlefield of Fontenoy (*Commentaire historique* . . . in the first volume of Voltaire's Works).

his advice trying to restrain him and communicate to him his young prudence. More than once he had cause to complain of him; he tells a story of a spurred boot with which the Duke one day struck him across the face, no doubt as thanks for some piece of good advice. Such brutalities are not forgotten. Commynes protests in many a passage against the *bestiality* of princes, and he continually draws comparisons between the senseless and the wise. He has known both kinds; he has a horror of stupid (*bête*) kings, who are incapable of taking advice; of those princes 'who are never in doubt or fear of their enemies, and who would think it a disgrace'. We can see whom he is thinking of when he speaks thus. Not that he is angry with Charles: can one be angry with those who are deficient in natural sense? Nay, he always speaks of him fittingly and with discretion when he does mention him; but he criticizes him: 'He was powerful, he said, in men and money, but he had not sense nor cunning (*malice*) enough to conduct his enterprises'. This word *malice* often recurs in Commynes, and always in a good sense. 'He was a *wise man and malicious*', he says of one of his characters. With Commynes, and this shows even in his language, the reign of chivalry is past, that of the bourgeoisie begins.

Everything estranged Commynes from Charles the Bold, everything drew him to Louis XI. It is easy to see from the first moment he speaks of the latter, that he will be the prince of his choice. Charles and his people have come to lay siege to Paris, from the side of Charenton; Louis XI renders the enterprise abortive without any risk to himself, by working insidiously and under cover of a truce at detaching his enemies one by one. He applied his maxim: *Divide in order to reign.* 'Of all those I have ever known, says Commynes, the wisest to get out of a difficulty in time of adversity, was King Louis XI, our master, and the most humble in speech and dress'. And he lets us into the secret of Louis' manner of proceeding, of winning men over to his side, of bribing them, of not being put off by a first refusal. In order to win a man, the first thing to know is: *What does he like?* 'Men's passions, said Vauvenargues, are so many paths opened to approach them'. Louis XI knew this principle, which every man who aspires to govern ought tc

know, and he artfully puts it in practice. Here, in Commynes, we have Louis' portrait true to life, without any caricature, with none of those exaggerations which have been brought into it, an exact and sharply outlined portrait in the manner of Holbein or Albert Dürer. 'He was naturally the friend of people of a middle estate and an enemy of all the great men who could be independent of him. No man ever lent so much ear to people nor sought information on so many things. . . . He knew all men of authority and worth who were in England, Spain and Portugal, Italy, as he knew his own subjects'. To so many qualities made to captivate Louis XI joined a fault, very serious in a king. Like the great Frederick he had a sarcastic, caustic tongue; he could not keep back a witticism at the expense of his people, when he did not fear them. But once the jest was discharged, how well he could make reparation, and condemn himself to the costs! He cured, with his liberality, to the best of his power the wounds he had dealt at a man's vanity. He said with perfect grace, for he could speak charmingly when he wished: 'My tongue has done me much harm, it has also given me much pleasure: it is right that I should pay the fine.' If not on our guard, we might at times catch ourselves not only excusing and approving Louis XI, but liking him for so much good grace and delicacy. This would be falling into another excess, and conceding him assuredly much more than Louis himself ever desired.

Commynes was twenty-one years old when the interview at Péronne took place (1488). Louis XI, one does not quite know how, and from excess of confidence in his superior adroitness, had placed himelf in Charles' power; the fox had thrown himself under the lion's claws. It was a terrible moment for the crafty one to be caught in the snares. Just then Charles had proofs that at the very moment when the King was coming to lure him with fine words and make him take back the onorous conditions of the sworn treaty, he was insidiously inciting the revolted Liégeois against him. In this crisis Commynes and Louis understood each other at once and by a look. Commynes slept in the Duke's chamber; he had seen him wandering about all night, disturbed by anger. He knew his plans just in time, and the limits

from which he would not depart. He sent warning to the King in time of the excess of the danger, and of the necessity of submitting at any price to the conditions which should be exacted. The scene in the morning between the King and the Duke is rendered to the life. The Duke trembles as he approaches the King ; his voice is harsh and betrays emotion, though he tries to appear calm. He lays down the extreme conditions, humiliating for Louis. The latter, with a mild air and without effort, replies yes to everything, and acts so well that in an instant his brusque adversary passes from anger to joy, almost to tenderness. 'The King's speech, says a contemporary of Commynes, was so sweet and *virtuous*, that it lulled like the Siren all that lent ear to him'. Homer vaunts the *honeyed* words of Ulysses. The seductive sweetness of La Rochefoucauld, of M. de Talleyrand, have likewise been vaunted. Louis XI was of that race and shared the same gift, that of managing minds by his accent and his caressing speech.

We must not omit a touch which paints Commynes as well as it does Louis XI. During the captivity at Péronne, before the last day and during the first overtures the King made, the latter offered to sign a treaty of peace all to the advantage of Charles, on condition that he should immediately regain his liberty and be allowed to return to Compiègne. He offered at the same time, as pledges of his sincere alliance and his early return, important hostages, such as the Duke of Bourbon, the Cardinal his brother and several others. The latter also offered themselves and appeared from their spoken words to desire this honour of being taken as hostages. 'I know not if they thought thus within themselves, adds Commynes, I suspect not ; and in truth I believe he would have left them there and not have returned'. Thus Commynes expresses his conjecture, and shows no indignation. The Italian genius of that epoch has conquered him. Commynes is not a Tacitus, but in smoothness, and without showing it, he is our Machiavelli. In his pages Louis XI appears in all his naked naturalness ; if he is at times odious, it is we who, on reflexion, see him and conclude him to be so : Commynes does not say so, and perhaps does not think so. That is a weak side to his morality which I do not pretend to hide.

If one had time to be amused, after seeing Louis XI caught in the snares and the fox in a tight place, one should see him a little on his own ground, with the advantage on his side, and playing in his turn with his enemies, as a cat plays with a mouse. As a just pendant to the scene at Péronne, we might exhibit an extremely comic *screen* scene, which leads to the ruin of the Constable of Saint-Pol. This great lord and officer of the Crown, in his efforts to curry favour with the King of France, the King of England and the Duke of Burgundy, for his own aggrandizement, only succeeded in giving offence on all sides. However the Duke of Burgundy still hesitated to consent to his ruin. One day when Louis receives an envoy of the Constable, at the moment when one Seigneur de Contay, a faithful servant of the Duke, is with him, he proposes to this Sieur de Contay to hide behind a screen with Commynes, whilst he makes the Constable's envoy talk. The envoy, who thinks he is alone with the King, makes merry over the Duke of Burgundy, mimics his fits of fury, his gestures and oaths. Louis, who has seated himself upon a low stool quite close to the screen, laughs loudly and tells him to repeat his words, to speak louder, says he is getting a little deaf. It is a comedy scene which recalls that in *Tartufe*, where Elmire, to convince her husband, has hidden him under the table. The Duke's man, on leaving, impatient with rage, hastens to have his horse saddled, to go and tell his master of the Constable's treachery. The latter, in spite of all the symptoms of storm, is unable to shelter himself, and dies a miserable death. 'I have known few people in my life, says Commynes, who know how to escape in time'.

Commynes was of that small number who know how to seize the hour and the moment. In the night of August 5 to 8, 1472, he abruptly left the Duke of Burgundy, and repaired to the King of France, who had long desired to have him on his side. This action of Commynes has been variously judged. In order to remain at the right point of view, we should not forget that the idea of country (*patrie*) was not then what it is now: the ties which laid a nobleman under obligation to his sovereign were above all of a personal nature; and Charles, by his fits of passion, by his bad behaviour, by his growing unreason,

had done his best to alienate a counsellor of Commynes' temper, just as Louis XI, by his fine promises and by keeping them, had neglected nothing to attract him. Commynes was only twenty-five years of age at the time, and he faithfully served Louis XI, as counsellor and chamberlain, until the King's death (1483). It was at the age of only thirty-six, then, that his ambition received the rudest check and his fortune was cut short. His career as a counsellor was interrupted at an age when it hardly begins with others. He has reason to remark somewhere that almost all who have done great things have begun very young; but what is very rare, is to counsel so wisely and see so clearly, to hold the scales so exactly, in that first half of life.

Commynes, in his Memoirs, is not only a narrator, he is a political philosopher, embracing, like Machiavelli and Montesquieu, extensive periods, the different forms of government, their principles and the remote consequences which spring from them.

Commynes saw and probed the plague-spot of those rude and violent times of the Middle Age, war. He prizes it little in its glory, he detests it in its *every-day* aspect; he holds in horror the outrages, habitually practised by the soldiers of the time, even in a friendly country, and like a worthy servant of his prudent master, he already understands modern positive interests. There is no bravado in him, no vainglory, no protracted chivalry: ' It is a great honour to fear what one should, he says, and to provide against it '. He is full of these maxims, which lead to the golden mean, as we understand it, and to the government of society without any violence, by means of a wise balancing of forces and interests.

He is an advocate of the English government, like Montesquieu, and for reasons of the same order. He is for *self-government*, or at least for voluntary taxes, on which depends everything else that concerns modern liberty and the constitutional order. And his are not fancies and opinions of the moment; he dwells upon them and embraces the modern idea in all its scope. On this point one should read the 19th chapter of the Fifth book, entitled *Character of the French People and of the Government of their Kings*, in order to appreciate Commynes and his political genius as he deserves. He lays down as

a principle that there is no king nor lord who has the power to impose a penny on his subjects without the consent and grant of those who are to pay it. He thinks that the delay itself that this consent involves in the case of war, is good and profitable; that kings and princes, when they undertake nothing except with the counsel of their subjects, are the stronger and the more feared by their enemies. He has remarked that, of all the lordships in the world that he has cognizance of, that in which the public affairs are best administered, where least violence is done to the people, even in times of civil war, is England. Thus, in the bloody struggles of the Roses, the disasters of war fell upon the nobles much more than upon the people and the inhabitants of the Communes. This moderation even in ills he attributes to the share of government and public action which the Communes have reserved to themselves in England. As to the King of France, Commynes is of opinion that he is no more entitled than any king to say: 'I am privileged to levy what I please upon my subjects'. For this privilege, *neither he nor any other has it.* The courtiers who by flattery concede it to him, do him more prejudice than honour. Here we have, in Commynes, in advance, the criticism of the saying of Louis XIV: *L'État, c'est moi,* and of those other words of a courtier to the child-king Louis XV: *Tout cela est à vous,* all these are yours. Commynes thinks it would be a good thing to hold regular States; that those who oppose them by uttering those grand words of majesty and royal authority, only do so from personal motives, because, being only frivolous men and only good for whispering sweet nonsense into the king's ear, they would cut a very poor figure in a great assembly where it was necessary to discuss seriously, and because they fear their works may be known and blamed. The subject leads him into budget details, into figures; as an able man he knows perfectly well that everything in politics depends on that. In this chapter Commynes anticipates the reforming ideas of Vauban, of d'Argenson. If I dared I would even say that I prefer this chapter to an analogous chapter of Montesquieu. It is Montesquieu drawn from the source, the natural source. It is the misfortune of France that such a government was not regularly constituted when the people were good, the Communes stable, the great bodies of the State

animated by a spirit of tradition, and the vitality of the kingdom in its integrity. After Louis XIV, after Louis XV, 1789 came too late. Society was already corrupted.

I will not go so far as to believe that Commynes advised Louis XI, so jealous and so distrustful in matters of authority, to hold the States. Commynes greatly commends his master for the unity he wished to establish in his kingdom, the unity in weights and measures, the unity in Customs (unwritten laws), and for the kind of *Civil Code* which he planned; add to this the project to abolish tolls in the interior, and to establish a free trade by rejecting the frontier duties. But the thought of Louis XI did not go beyond. These ideas of Commynes may not have occurred to him until after the death of his master, when he in his turn had known adversity and oppression, and had been able to verify by experience his maxim: 'The greatest ills generally come from the strongest; for the weak only seek patience'. But, whatever their date in the life of Commynes, the ideas we have seen give the measure of the extent of his horizon. This is the most serious and original side of him, by which he has merited to be the *breviary* of the statesmen who have followed him. In a word, Commynes is so modern in his ideas and views, that in reading him we might allot him (which is very rare for an author of a different epoch) the place he would be sure to have held in our present social order, and under the different kinds of government which we have passed through since 1789.

Meanwhile Louis XI falls ill: he has several attacks of apoplexy, which impair his temper more and more and aggravate his suspicions. The picture of Louis' last years in Commynes is of a striking truth and inimitable. Poets and novelists have drawn upon him for their subjects; but neither Walter Scott's novels nor Béranger's songs render the reality in all its justness, and with the perfect measure with which it appears to us under Commynes' pen, curious, attentive, faithful, and so foreign to any literary aim, to dramatic effect. Louis' first attack of apoplexy occurred at Les Forges, near Chinon. He was at table; he suddenly lost power of speech; he tried to approach the window, but his attendants, thinking they were acting for the best, prevented him and kept him near the fire. As soon as he recovers, a few days

after, the first thing that awakes in him and resumes consciousness, is his cunning, his distrust. He makes inquiries about those who held him by force in the first moment, and turns them all out of the house, less in real than in feigned anger, and to serve as an example to those who might be tempted in future to take advantage of his weakness to encroach in any way upon his authority: 'For he was a master, said Commynes, with whom one had to drive straight'. Even before recovering all his mental faculties, he pretends to understand the despatches which are brought and read to him; he takes them in his hand, and pretends to read them himself, though still unable to see anything: the king awakes in him before the man. Having returned to Tours, and confined in his castle of Plessis, Louis XI indulges all the eccentricities we know of, but of which the aim and intention were above all political. The more strictly he confines himself within his self-imposed prison, the more does he try to multiply himself in others' ideas and his own, to appear alive. He sent in all directions, for example, to buy thoroughbred horses and hounds, to foreign countries, wherever he wished it to be believed that he was strong and able to follow the chase. All this to keep up the illusion to the end with others and himself. These incomparable details, given by Commynes, an assiduous eye-witness, who did not leave the King's chamber, make of this part of his history the most eloquent picture of royal and human wretchedness. Here the name of Tacitus naturally suggests itself, with the picture of Tiberius confining himself to the island of Capreae; but Tiberius' story is of a character both more atrocious and grander. The island of Capreae has a different aspect, another profile than the castle of Plessis-lez-Tours. Similarly, Tiberius' acts, dated from there, that *great letter* written to the Senate, with which he consummates the ruin of Sejanus, the edifice of stratagems and even the idleness and debauches, all is of a different compass and savours of Roman power. Even ignoble vice there becomes colossal. The dominant quality of Tacitus' talent, that compound of the grave and the august, is throughout eminently applicable to it; it would be superfluous in the picture of Louis XI. The naïveté and Gallic satire of Commynes are more in keeping. It

would be a mistake to believe, however, that comparison between Commynes and Tacitus in this connexion is a wrong to the latter ; Commynes, in the reflexions he appends to his story, on the misery of men and especially of princes, has attained to the truest and most touching moral considerations. No historian expresses as vividly as he does the profound sentiment of the misery of the great and of kings, of the powerful and fortunate of the earth. One recognizes here the man who has slept for long years, as chamberlain, in their rooms, who has witnessed their sleepless nights and bad dreams, and who, from the flower of their age till their death, has not observed in these so envied destinies a single *good day* : 'Would it not have been better for him, he says of Louis XI, for him and for all other princes, and for men of middle estate who have lived under these great men and will live under those who reign, to elect the middle path. . . . : that is to say, to be less anxious and less to torment themselves, and to undertake fewer things ; to have more fear of offending God and of persecuting the people and their neighbours in so many cruel ways, and to take their ease and honest pleasures ? Their lives would be longer ; maladies would come later ; and their death would be more regretted and by more people and less desired. . . .' Do we not see the equal of Tacitus in these passages, and in many others where Commynes' accents sometimes recall those of Bossuet ? After comparing, for example, the misfortunes which about the same time struck the houses of France and Castile : 'And it seems, he says, that Our Lord has regarded these two houses with a stern countenance, and that he *does not will that one kingdom make sport of the other*'.

After the death of Louis XI, Commynes' Memoirs perceptibly lose in interest. The account of the conquest of Italy, under Charles VIII, and of the march upon Naples, is obscure, diffuse, without order ; it has been doubted indeed, up to a certain point, whether this part of the Memoirs was his work. One sees well that the able man is here not always so close an eye-witness, as he is elsewhere. He resumes his superiority as a historian when he assists in person, in the detail of the negotiations with Venice, and in the account of the battle of Fornovo.

I am not writing Commynes' biography. It has been

incomplete hitherto ; it is the merit of the present editor, Mlle. Dupont, to have thrown a light upon the obscure places. One important fact is to be noted here : like Bacon, Commynes was culpable and weak upon a delicate point ; both have had blots of the same kind in their life, through their too great love of worldly goods. Dishonestly enriched by Louis XI, who lavished upon him the unjustly confiscated estates of the house of La Trémouille, Commynes had to clear his accounts after his master's death, and only at the last extremity did he restore the spoils of the innocent. His political fortune never rose again, and only had some untrustworthy returns. It was a good fortune for him, however, and for us, that towards the end of his life he experienced years of adversity : we have gained a great historian, and he an immortal name. What he likewise regarded as a misfortune of his early education, his not having been instructed from his early youth in ancient Letters, turned no less to his advantage and to his glory as an original writer. He had had no more education than M. de la Rochefoucauld, no other than that of men and things ; for well-constituted minds that is the best education, and it suffices.

Commynes entirely verifies in my opinion the saying of Vauvenargues : 'The politicians know mankind better than those who make a profession of philosophy : I mean that they are more truly philosophers'. But, to be that, they must be true politicians, and there are few who can show an equal claim to this title. In an age when all the world thinks itself qualified to deal with politics, it would not be ill to observe in Commynes what are the requisite qualities in those whom nature has destined for that rare science.

THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN[1]

Monday, January 14, 1850.

HERE is a brief, very simple, very interesting narrative, which makes no pretensions to being a history of the Russian expedition, of that expedition which was eloquently presented by M. de Ségur, seriously discussed by M. de Chambray, which other writers will again embrace in its entirety. M. de Fezensac, at the time of this campaign, was twenty-six years of age. Successively aide-de-camp to Prince Berthier, then Colonel, he wrote for his own use a diary of what he saw and what he did, or rather what was done and suffered by his regiment, which, in the retreat, fought in the extreme rearguard, under Ney's orders. It is this sincere and truthful journal, at first intended solely for a circle of intimates, that he has decided to publish to-day.

The reflexions which this simple narration gives rise to are of more than one kind; the impression it leaves on the mind is ineradicable. On reading it, we gain an accurate idea of the nature of that great disaster from its origin and in its last consequences, a much better idea than we obtain from the reading of more general and more extensive narratives. Here one is not in several places at the same time, one is at a single definite spot; one marches day by day, one drags oneself along; one forms part of a single group that every murderous hour diminishes. We lose none of the details and the continuity of the sufferings. Heroism may flash forth admirably to the very last, we can see only too well the causes of this flame, and that it will die out for want of fuel. The result is a very melancholy light thrown upon the moral

[1] *Diary of the Russian Campaign in 1812.* By M. de Fezensac, Lieut.-General (1849).

nature of man, quite a study which, once made, is at bottom inexorable, involuntary. But whilst the heart bleeds and the imagination is wrung, we are consoled by the reflexion that we have for companion and guide a modest, firm and humane warrior, whose feelings with their delicate bloom have succeeded in overcoming the cruellest ordeals. M. de Fezensac, nourished on literary memories, was entitled to place at the head of his work these touching lines of the most pious of ancient poets, of Virgil speaking through the mouth of his hero : *Iliaci cineres, et flamma extrema meorum* . . ., which he adapts to the situation, and translates as follows : ' O, ashes of Ilion ! and you, shades of my comrades ! I take you to witness that, in your disaster, I fled neither before the shafts of the enemy nor before any kind of danger, and that, if my destiny had so willed, I was worthy to die with you '.

In the first part of the narrative, which extends to the battle of the Moskwa, and which only forms a sort of introduction, M. de Fezensac, then Major and aide-de-camp to Maréchal Berthier, confines himself to taking a rapid and accurate view of the facts, as his central position permitted. Sparing as he is of general considerations, it is easy to feel with him, from the beginning of this gigantic expedition, that the limits of human power are passed, and that the genius of one man, though he were the greatest of men, cannot pretend to contain and direct in its frame so exorbitant an organization. The civil administration of the army, the different service corps dependent upon the general Intendance, which were passed in review at Vilna by Maréchal Berthier, alone formed an army which, charged with supplying the wants of the other, was unable to supply its own. In spite of the zeal of the chiefs, in a country which offered so few resources, ' this huge administration was almost useless from the very beginning of the campaign, and in the end became harmful '. The troops themselves, so brilliant and so inured, have their weak parts which betray themselves from the very first. On the march, a few leagues beyond Vilna, ' we met, says M. de Fezensac several regiments of the Young Guard ; I remarked, among others the regiment of flankers, formed of very young men. This regiment had started from Saint-

Denis, and had had only one day's rest at Mayence and one at Marienwerder, on the Vistula; and then the soldiers were made to drill on marching days, after arrival in camp, because the Emperor did not consider them sufficiently well instructed. So this regiment was the first that perished; already the soldiers were dying from exhaustion on the road'.

In spite of the extraordinary successes which signalize the beginning of the campaign, in spite of the conquest of Lithuania within a month, almost without a fight, and although the valiant younger men indulge themselves in hope, the thoughtful ones see the future in a much less favourable light. They were still at Vitebsk, and already 'the men of a prudent mind and experienced officers were not without uneasiness'. They saw the army diminished *by a third* after the crossing of the Niemen, and not as the result of fighting, but through the impossibility of subsisting in a poor country, which the enemy laid waste as they quitted it. They remarked the terrible mortality in horses, which most frequently had no other fodder than the thatch of the roofs; a part of the cavalry on foot for want of horses, the conveyance of the artillery rendered more difficult, and in consequence the sick almost without help in the hospitals. 'They wondered not only what would be the fate of this army if beaten, but how it would bear the losses which would be caused by fresh marches and more serious battles'. Still these gloomy previsions, which were only too justified by subsequent events, might even then vanish and be dispelled in one of those unexpected and glorious solutions with which the history of wars is filled.

After the battle of the Moskwa, M. de Fezensac from aide-de-camp became Colonel of the Fourth Regiment of the line. From this time his narrative is merely the story of this regiment and of the Third Corps, of which it formed part. The unity in the interest commences.

From the first day on which he takes over his command, the new Colonel is struck by the exhausted state of the troops and their numerical weakness. 'In the principal headquarters, he says, they looked only at results, without thinking of what they cost, and they had no idea of the situation of the army; but on taking command of a regiment, I had to enter into all the details I was

ignorant of, and knew the depth of the evil'. The Fourth Regiment was reduced to 900 men, from 2,800 who had crossed the Rhine. All the parts of their dress, and especially their foot-gear, were in a bad state. The morale of the troops had already been deeply impaired; one heard no more of the former gaiety of the men, their songs in bivouac, which used to cheer them after the fatigues of the day: it was quite a new disposition in a French army, and that after a victory.

A regiment is a family, and the rôle of Colonel, conceived in its true spirit, is one of the finest that can be played. He commands a group of men already considerable, but enjoying besides a perfect unity, whom he holds entirely in his hands and under his eyes, each of whom he may know by name, and follow day by day in his acts. In the higher ranks, one sees further, on a larger scale; the genius of war, if one has it, finds more room for development. But, from the point of view of military morality, in that vast confraternity which is called an army, nowhere can one do so much good, such direct and continuous good, as in the rank of a Colonel.

M. de Fezensac, young, endowed with all those qualities which humanize and civilize war, conceived this rôle in its noblest sense, and we may say its moral beauty; henceforth he only endeavoured to play it well. The sight of the burning of Moscow and of the scenes of desolation which had accompanied it had painfully affected him: turning away his eyes from misfortunes which he could not mitigate, he set his heart at least upon preventing those which were within his power, and of discharging all useful duties. During the month of residence in Moscow and its environs, he had given all his attention to supplying the material wants of his regiment and to keep up their morale. On the eve of the retreat, October 18, the Emperor reviewed the Third Corps, which was Ney's, at the Kremlin. 'This review was as fine as the circumstances permitted. The Colonels vied with each other in their zeal to present their regiments in good condition. Nobody seeing them could have imagined how much the soldiers had suffered and were still suffering. I am convinced, adds M. de Fezensac, that the fine bearing of our army in the midst of the greatest miseries contributed much to the Emperor's obstinacy, by persuading him that with such men nothing was impossible'.

The review was hardly over, when the Colonels received the order to leave next day. They carried off in carts all the remaining provisions: 'I left in my house, says M. de Fezensac, the flour which I could not take away; I had been advised to destroy it; but I could not make up my mind to deprive the poor inmates of it and gave it to them willingly, to compensate them for the ill we had been forced to do them. I received their blessings with emotion and gratitude. Perhaps they have brought me luck'.

The retreat begins. The army drags after it everything that has escaped the burning of the city. Vehicles of every kind, among them the most elegant carriages, filled with precious objects, mingle with the fourgons and the carts filled with provisions. 'These conveyances, advancing in several rows along the wide Russian roads, looked like an immense caravan. Having reached the top of a hill, I contemplated for a long time, says the narrator, this spectacle which recalled the wars of the conquerors of Asia; the plain was covered with these immense baggage-waggons, and the church towers of Moscow formed on the horizon a background to the picture'.

Even in these first moments of the retreat, it was a difficult task to impose order and discipline. M. de Fezensac omitted nothing to maintain it in his regiment. As the army retreated, all the villages were burned. Davoust, who at first commanded the rear-guard, was charged to set fire everywhere, 'and never was an order carried out with more exactness and even scrupulousness'. M. de Fezensac, when he narrates, finds those words which appear insignificant, which are as discreet as words which are used in good company, but which mean a great deal.

After the failure of the first retreating movement in the direction of Kaluga, the army had to turn back along the high road to Smolensk, all desolate and laid waste, and return along the bloody tracks it had itself made. From the very first the retreat resembled a rout. At Viasma, the Third Corps, that of Ney, had orders to relieve that of Davoust in the rear-guard; and from this moment, the difficult and glorious task of arresting the pursuit of the enemy and of covering the march of the army, was entrusted to the most capable man in this critical conjuncture. M. de Fezensac, at the head of the Fourth Regiment, had his

share in this honour. We will follow the memorable episode of which he is the faithful narrator.

From Viasma to Smolensk they disputed the ground foot by foot and wherever they could, at Dorogobuz, at Slobpnevo, at all the bridges across the Dnieper. Ney always thought they did not do enough; he sometimes came to the head of the column and took a rifle, as he is seen represented on the popular prints. To the objections sometimes raised by the Generals of brigade, who appear to have been a little nerveless and undecided, he would reply forcibly 'that it was only a question of being killed, after all, and that the opportunity was too good to be missed'. At Smolensk they expected to find at least a little rest and some bread; but disorder and pillage were everywhere. The rear-guard, coming last because they fought for all the rest, found nothing. They continued to struggle with abnegation. The Colonel of the Fourth Regiment was among the last to defend one of the suburbs of the town which was being evacuated; the last time he drove the enemy out of it, who were pressing forward too eagerly to occupy it. 'Maréchal Ney then sent me word, adds the narrator, not to advance too far, a very rare recommendation coming from him'. The eulogies of the Maréchal, on the evening itself of this action, were reported by the Colonel to the officers, and rejoiced their hearts. The Colonel had thus far succeeded in preserving intact among his men the religion of the flag. No officer had been dangerously wounded; 500 soldiers of the regiment still remained, 'and how tried this little number of men were! I was proud, says their chief, of the glory they had won; I enjoyed in anticipation the repose I hoped soon to see them enjoy. This illusion was quickly dispelled; but I still love to retain the memory of it, and it was the last pleasant feeling I experienced in the course of this campaign'.

After leaving Smolensk, they were calmly enough making for Orcha, when suddenly the Third Corps, on the point of arriving at Krasnoi, is unexpectedly arrested by the Russian cannon. They were greatly puzzled. No warning had been given by the corps which preceded them; it was not a matter of a detachment of the enemy intercepting the route, it was quite an army of 80,000 men

under the command of Miloradowitsch interposing itself between Ney and the rest of the French army. A flag of truce was sent by the Russian General, who summoned the Maréchal to lay down his arms; he added all sorts of compliments for his person. The message was received as one might have expected of a man like Ney. 'The Third Corps, says M. de Fezensac, with the reinforcements received at Smolensk, did not amount to six thousand combatants; the artillery was reduced to six pieces of cannon, the cavalry to a single escort division. But the Maréchal's only reply was to make the bearer prisoner: a few cannon shots fired during this kind of negotiation served as pretext; and, without considering the masses of the enemy and the small number of his own men, he ordered the attack'. This attack was what might have been expected, desperate, heroic, but it broke their strength. They had to fall back and retrace their steps. What was the Maréchal going to do? After retreating half a league, he directs his troop to the left across country. Let the eye-witness speak:—

'The day was declining; the Third Corps marched in silence; none of us knew what was going to become of us. But the presence of Maréchal Ney was enough to reassure us. Though we did not know what he would nor what he could do, we knew that he would do something. His own confidence in himself was equal to his courage. The greater the danger, the more prompt was his determination; and, when he had decided upon a course, he never doubted of success. Besides, in such a moment, his countenance expressed neither indecision nor anxiety; all eyes were directed upon him, no one dared to question him. At last, seeing an officer of his Staff at his side, he said to him in a low voice: *We are in a fix.—What will you do*, replied the officer.—*Cross the Dnieper.—Where is the road?—We will find it.—Supposing it is not frozen.—It will be.—A la bonne heure!* said the officer. This singular dialogue, which I repeat word for word, revealed the Maréchal's plan to gain Orcha by the right bank of the river, and rapidly enough to find the army still there, moving along the left bank'.

It was carried out in every particular, just as the Maréchal had suddenly resolved. In this night march across country, how were they to find their way? how reach the Dnieper as quickly as possible? The Maréchal, 'gifted with that talent of the warrior which teaches him to take

advantage of the smallest circumstances', observed in the plain a line of ice and had it broken to see the direction of the current, thinking it must be a tributary of the Dnieper. They followed the stream; they reached an abandoned village. A lame peasant, who had lingered in flight, was taken as guide. Large fires were lighted to make the enemy believe that they were going to camp in this place. Whilst they were occupied in finding a spot where the Dnieper was frozen sufficiently hard to allow a crossing, in this short interval of time 'Maréchal Ney alone, oblivious both of the dangers of the day and of those of the morrow, was in a deep sleep'.

About the middle of the night the Dnieper is crossed, but only by the infantry; very few horses are able to pass over the too thin ice. They had to abandon the artillery, the baggage, and (sad necessity of war) the wounded to the enemy. The plan has partially succeeded. They are on the other bank, but in a strange country, still more than fifteen leagues from Orcha, where they hope to rejoin the French army. They are not yet at the end of this most perilous and adventurous march; they have escaped one danger only to fall into another. The main body of Cossacks, commanded by Platow in person, is suddenly encountered; they expect to make short work of a handful of worn-out infantry men, with neither cavalry nor artillery. The smallest incidents in this second half of the march are worth following in M. de Fezensac's narrative. At one moment, the remnants of his regiment, in Ney's rear-guard, find themselves cut off and lost at night-time in a fir wood. Thus he finds himself, in respect of Ney, in the same state of isolation in which they all are in respect of the main army.

'We had traversed the wood in such different directions, that we were quite at a loss which way to go; the fires we saw lighted on different sides contributed to our confusion. The officers of my regiment were consulted, and we followed the direction recommended by the majority. I will not undertake to describe all we had to suffer during this cruel night. I had only a hundred men with me, and we were more than a league in the rear of our column. To rejoin it we had to pass through the enemies who surrounded us. We had to march with sufficient rapidity to make up for lost time, and with sufficient order to resist the attacks of the Cossacks. The darkness of the night, the uncer-

tainty of the direction we were taking, the difficulty of marching through the wood, everything increased our dilemma. The Cossacks shouted to us to surrender, and fired amongst us at close range; those who were hit were abandoned. A sergeant had his leg shattered by a carbine shot. He fell at my side, saying coolly to his comrades: *Here is a lost man; take my knapsack, you may profit by it.* They took his sack, and we left him in silence. Two wounded officers had the same fate. Meanwhile I observed with anxiety the impression which this situation made upon the privates, and even the officers of my regiment. Some who had been heroes on the field of battle now appeared anxious and disturbed, so true it is that the circumstances of a danger often cause more fear than the danger itself. A very small number preserved the presence of mind which was so necessary to us. I needed all my authority to maintain order on the march and prevent each one from quitting his rank. One officer even dared to suggest that we might perhaps be forced to surrender. I reprimanded him in a loud voice, and the more severely because he was a meritorious officer, which made the lecture more impressive. At last, after more than an hour, we issued from the wood and found the Dnieper on our left. The direction was then assured, and this discovery gave the soldiers a moment of joy which I took advantage of to encourage them and to recommend that coolness which alone could save us'.

Thus with prodigies of strength and firmness, which had to be renewed at every step, they rejoined Ney, and with Ney they at length rejoined the army, at the very moment when, despairing of seeing him, it was about to quit Orcha. From this time, the Third Corps shares the lot of the rest of the army. But M. de Fezensac's narrative, whilst becoming a little less particular, does not on that account lose in interest. We may follow in it step by step the disorganization, the destruction of this immense force, a destruction which always seems to have reached its extreme limit, and which always has another degree to overcome. By being brought to study it at one precise spot, one is able to take a more exact and terrible measure of it. Thus Ney's Corps, which amounted to 10 or 11,000 on leaving Moscow, which was still 6,000 strong at the combat of Krasnoi, is reduced to 8 or 900 men on reaching Orcha. After the crossing of the Beresina they only succeed, with these remnants, in collecting a hundred men in fighting condition, who form an escort to the Maréchal. The Fourth Regiment, that

of M. de Fezensac, on leaving Vilna, and at the moment of crossing the Niemen, is composed of no more than a score of sick officers, and the same number of men, half of whom are unarmed. It is the remnants of this Corps, however, with the addition of a few other wrecks, who receive the order to form the rear-guard to the last, and to defend to the best of their power the bridge of Kovno, to give the bulk of the routed army time to pass over. One should see how Ney regains and inspires a last burst of energy, in order to acquit himself of this order with honour. Even after crossing the Niemen, and when they have reason at length to think themselves in safety, this extreme rear-guard is suddenly in danger of being captured by a party of Cossacks, and they are obliged to renew a night-march across country, still led by Ney, which recalls, but more sadly, the adventure of the Dnieper. 'A white horse, says M. de Fezensac, which we alternately rode bare-backed, was of great help to us'. This white horse, that each rides *bare-backed* in turn, is the finishing touch to the picture, and it should be contrasted with that other spectacle of 500,000 men proudly crossing the Niemen six months before.

Moral reflexions crowd upon us during this story, of which I have yet omitted many thrilling particulars. In these great trials which demand of a man more than he can give, human nature, exhausted at last and worn out as it is, shows so to say its threadbareness. Everything that has been acquired, everything that has been learned, vanishes; there remains only the thread of the groundwork. All those exalted and delicate sentiments, those fine qualities, those social virtues inculcated from childhood, transmitted by generations, which seem to be the noble inheritance of civilized man, the love of country and glory, honour, devotion to one's fellows, friendship, all this gradually becomes obscured and enfeebled until it vanishes. With the majority, physical feeling irresistibly gets the better of the moral; the instinct of preservation, the selfishness of living becomes pronounced. One sees many brave men, men who appeared heroes before the fire of the enemy, henceforth struggling with hunger and cold, exclaiming with the poor man in the fable: *As long as I live, after all, I am content!* And it is still a proof of energy to say that; for there comes a degree of demoraliza-

tion where this last spring snaps, when one has no more desire to live, and when, to escape pain and fatigue, everything becomes indifferent. How few are they in whom an exalted feeling of honour, sympathy, devotion, any religion whatever, is inseparable to the last from the need to live inherent in every nature, and whom this religion only leaves at the last breath! One feels, in reading M. de Fezensac, that even in the most desperate moments of the terrible ordeal, there were still some souls of that energetic and exquisite temper, and that it is which comforts':—

'In the midst of such horrible calamities, says the Colonel of the Fourth, the destruction of my regiment gave me a very keen pain. That was my real suffering, or rather my only suffering; for I do not call hunger, fatigue or cold by that name. When the health resists physical sufferings, courage soon begins to despise them, especially when it is sustained by the idea of God, by the hope of another life; but I confess that my heart failed me on seeing fall before my eyes friends, companions in arms, who are justly called the family of the Colonel, and whom he seemed here to have been called to command only to preside at their destruction'.

Nothing in the history of civilized nations is to be compared with this disaster of 1812. The Retreat of the Ten Thousand has sometimes been recalled in this connexion; but there is no affinity either in the proportions, or in respect of the circumstances and the results, between the heroic and ingenious retreat recorded by the genius of Xenophon, and the immense catastrophe in which the greatest of modern armies was swallowed up. We might rather seek a mild precedent of the misfortune of 1812 in the deadly retreat from Prague, in 1742. Voltaire and Vauvenargues spoke of it, but too oratorically, and we should prefer precise facts. Why did not Vauvenargues think of simply writing the Journal of his regiment? It may be readily concluded, however, from some of his words, that it was, in smaller proportions, equally fatal and marked by extremities of the same kind, as the retreat after Moscow: 'Is that, he was able to say, the army which scattered terror before it? You see! fortune changes: this army is in its turn afraid; it hastens its flight through forests and snows. It marches without stopping. Sickness, hunger, excessive fatigue

overwhelm our young soldiers. Poor wretches ! one sees them stretched on the snow, inhumanly forsaken. Fires kindled on the ice light up their last moments. The earth is their dreadful bed '. There too, as a consolation for those saddening scenes, we see courage and honour shining in some with a more brilliant splendour in the thickest of the distress ; we see young officers, humane, generous, compassionate as well as brave, and worthy at the same time of the praise awarded to one of them, to that young Hippolyte de Seytres, whose name is consecrated by an eloquent friendship : ' Moderate even in war, thy spirit never lost its gentleness and charm ' ! Similar memories may naturally be recalled in connexion with the author of the present narrative : he is one of those whom Xenophon himself would not have disowned for his tone, and he remembers Virgil. Xavier de Maistre, I imagine, in presence of the like scenes, would not have felt them differently. As to his real services in this campaign, Maréchal Ney wrote from Berlin, on January 23, 1813, to the Minister for War, M. de Fezensac's father-in-law : ' That young man found himself in very critical circumstances, and always showed himself superior to them. I recommend him to you for a true French knight, and you may henceforth regard him as a veteran Colonel '. Ney's heroic figure never ceased to dominate and fill the history we have perused ; and it was fitting and glorious indeed to crown it with such words of commendation from him.

PUBLIC READINGS[1]

Monday, January 21, 1850.

SOMEBODY had the idea, at a time when ideas were plentiful and of many kinds, and not all as laudable as this, of instituting in the different quarters of Paris, Public Evening Readings, for the benefit of the working classes, of those who, occupied all day, have only an hour or two at their disposal after the day's work. These Readings, which were to be accompanied by as little criticism as possible, only the most strictly necessary in the matter of comments, in which the reader was above all to avoid the appearance of *professoring*, had for their aim to spread a taste for intellectual things, to make known by extracts the master-pieces of our literature, and insensibly to instruct the hearers whilst entertaining them. A good reading of a fine piece of eloquence or a play is a sort of representation on a small scale, an oratorical action or dramatic recitation, in reduced form and within the reach of all, which, though delivered in a tone approaching the habitual, still allows the effect to remain. It is almost what an engraving, a lithograph is to the painted picture. These Evening Readings have already had some effect and a certain measure of success; they are far, however, from having attained all the development they might be susceptible of and which they deserve. They have hitherto had to pass through the administrative offices of several Ministries, which did not all perhaps look upon them with the same favour. There was some sort of original stigma attaching to them, due to the time and circumstances of their birth. One had had such a horror and dislike of political clubs, that the prejudice may have at first extended, through an inaccurate association of

[1] *Public Evening Readings, what they are and what they might be.*

ideas, to what resembled them least, and was calculated rather to be a cure for them. It is time, now that experience has had its sufficient say, now that the men of merit who undertook these humble Readings from pure zeal have shown sufficiently well in what useful and disinterested sense they conceive them, and the public on their part have shown in what spirit of propriety and attention they come to them, it is time, I think, to give to this form of instruction the stability, the unity, the organization, in short, which alone can assure their full effect and duration. Such an institution rightly understood is more than any other in accordance with the spirit of present society, in the eyes of whoever frankly accepts the latter, and desires to see it moderately and regularly progressive.

I have, then, spent my evenings of this week in listening to some of these Readings, which began again at the opening of the winter. At the Lycée Charlemagne I heard M. Just Olivier read a few pages of J.-J. Rousseau, two acts of Molière's *École des Maris*, and give his audience a taste for these authors; at the Palais-Royal (Nemours vestibule) I heard Dr. Lemaout arouse appreciation and almost applause for Étienne's comedy *Les Deux Gendres*; at the Conservatoire of Music I heard M. Émile Souvestre, in a broader frame, give in one evening, accompanied by explanations both useful and acute, the *Battle of the Franks* from Chateaubriand's *Martyrs*, and as a contrast, the gay comedy *Le Grondeur* of Brueys and Palaprat. There are two other readers besides, M. Dubois d'Avesnes and M. Henri Trianon, whom I regret not having been able to hear. What I heard sufficed however to enlighten me with regard to the present state of things. I have talked besides with several of these distinguished men who find an honour in the simple title of readers, and I in my turn will take the liberty of discoursing a little on the subject, submitting my ideas to theirs and hastening to acknowledge that I am borrowing much from them in what I am going to say.

What is peculiar to this kind of indirect instruction is that it is a *reading* and not a *lecture*; it is that the master does not put himself forward, that there is strictly speaking no master, but a guide who keeps just ahead and goes the same pace with you. 'It is not a matter, to quote the words of the original Programme, of giving a

course of lectures on literature or French rhetoric, nor lectures on Aesthetics, but simply a series of readings. A good reading carries its commentary with it.' This last observation is true, with a little amendment however. I very readily admit the line drawn between the reading and the lecture; I believe, however, that one may go a considerable distance in the way of explanations, of comments, without the reading ceasing to be a reading. The comment lies in the tone, no doubt, but why should it not also lie in a rapid parenthesis, thrown out cursorily, forming no interruption and hastening the understanding?

I will go further, and give the result of my very short experience as a professor. In my opinion, leaving out of the question the altogether higher and learned courses, such as I imagine those of the Collège de France and the Faculties to be, lectures on literature, in order to be useful and to fulfil their real object should consist in great part of readings, of abundant extracts, chosen with care, and more or less commented upon. When you have to lecture on an author, begin by reading him attentively yourself, note the characteristic passages, choose your points well, and then read and open out pages of that author skilfully brought together, so that, with the help of a very little intervention on your part, he will translate and portray himself in the minds of your hearers. A tone which emphasizes, which underlines, so to say, whilst reading; a few cursory and as it were marginal observations, introduced into the reading, and distinguished by a different tone; a few comparisons pointed out with a delicate finger, will suffice to enable the hearer to seize the principal vein, and form an impression for himself. Thus he will follow you with an honest freedom, and will draw his conclusion at the same time as you, without thinking he is accepting the authority of a master, without accepting it in fact, and form for himself a distinct idea of the author in question. No doubt one cannot read the whole of each author; there is no need to read more than enough of him to give a clear idea of the direction of his manner, and to excite in the hearer, on leaving the hall, a desire to know more about him by having recourse to the original: but one should, in all strictness, have already offered and served up a sufficiently ample choice

to enable him, without any further investigation, to retain a correct remembrance of the subject, and to attach a precise idea to each name he has heard. The art of criticism, in a word, in its most practical and vulgar sense, consists in being able to read an author judiciously, and to teach others to read him in the same way, by making their path easy and saving them the trouble of feeling their way.

That being true, even of lectures, I do not think that we need really set up so essential a difference between the lecture and the reading. Only, it is right that the latter, though in the end it comes to the same thing, should never be made to have the appearance of a lecture. That is the delicate point to bear in mind.

In the present case one has to do with fresh minds, not soft and delicate like those of children, with minds as a rule healthy and well-balanced, though some of them already infected by the declamatory currents which are in the air of the century, with masculine minds, a little rough, rather intractable at the first, which might easily become distrustful and suspicious, which would certainly become restive if one tried to assert too much authority. The great art lies in using tact, in not pretending to dictate to them in advance the impressions which should simply follow from what one puts before them. One must at first *feel* them, as Montaigne would say, test them for some time, let them run before one to show their natural paces. A reader who has stood his tests, who has shown them that he has no cut and dried ideas, no other design than their intellectual improvement, and who has thereby succeeded in acquiring some credit with his audience, such a reader will naturally be able to do much more than one who is making his first appearance. If once he is quite established and anchored in their confidence, in close and complete sympathy with his public, he will be able to do much without ever intimidating and without appearing to presume in any way.

As for explanations, in any case, and even reducing them to the smallest dimensions, the reader cannot dispense with placing, in a preamble, the audience at the right point of view, introducing in a few words the author from whom he is going to read, exhibiting this author *in his right place* in his century, and bringing the two parties, so to say, face to face in such a manner, that the

effect, in a certain degree at least, may not fail. So a Swiss guide, when ascending the Righi or any other mountain, takes you to the best spot, a little before dawn, and stands by your side: and suddenly you see the sun rising on the horizon, and with its own bright light gradually developing the immense landscape, in which the guide then points out the lofty summits and tells you their names. This manner of demonstration applied to literature presupposes quite a hidden art, which is second to no science or critical superiority, however elevated and distinguished; for it is not simply a matter of making oneself little with the little, one must make oneself supple with the rude, insinuating with the robust, whilst remaining ever sincere, with that sincerity which desires only the beautiful and the good; one must engraft a sort of delicacy upon good sense, strengthen its simple parts, gently discourage declamatory tendencies, more innate in France than one might think, in short bring out of each one that quality which is only too willing to admire, but has never found its object. To furnish matter and occasion for admiration, that is the task in itself; and what other is more enviable and more beautiful?

All that being said, and under the influence of this noble inspiration, there will still remain in practice a very great difficulty, that of approaching, upon a mass of subjects, and without appearing to play the professor, unprepared minds which have not received a first regular layer of knowledge. Every time, for example, that one introduces a new book or a new author, with every plan of a new reading that one has to suspend, so to say, in the minds of the hearers, one finds oneself obliged to erect quite a special apparatus. And with all these necessarily very varied and disparate readings, one only succeeds in forming a series of literary accidents or anecdotes, without relation or connexion. To return to our comparison, what is wanting to all these plans, is a solid and continuous background to which to attach them. So, as an auxiliary and indispensable complement to these Public Readings, that they may attain their full result and produce all their fruit, it would seem necessary to establish two little parallel Courses, which I will indicate in a few words:—

1. A Course of general and national History. In a Course of this kind, the history of the world should be treated, as one may well believe, in a very summary, very rapid fashion: the history of France alone should be more fully developed. I ask pardon, I desire here simply that one should do for all the world what Bossuet, in his time, did for the Dauphin in that admirable *Discourse* which, unfortunately, stops at Charlemagne, there where modern development was about to begin. The Dauphin was then heir presumptive to the monarchy. Now all the world is the Dauphin, and to them belongs, willing or no, the future; it is all the world then that we must hasten to educate.

2. Independently of the Course on History proper, it would be fitting to establish a very simple, very clear Course on general modern Literature, and on French Literature in particular, the latter, as in the preceding case, entitled to the principal development. One might rapidly explain how the language formed itself, how it already counts several centuries of master-pieces. One might pass in review all the great names of writers in their succession and their natural generation. The mention of each of these celebrated writers would form an appropriate occasion for the introduction of biographical and anecdotic details, provided that one does not choose the futile, but only the characteristic anecdote. To render these simple Courses interesting, at the same time clear and pleasing, when addressing audiences consisting, not of quite young minds, but of adult and more exacting minds, it would not be superfluous to have a man of talent, capable of being put to uses apparently, but not really, much higher.

In these two Courses I should wish that the reader, whilst dwelling on the beauties and grandeur of French literature and of the national history, should refrain from saying what is being said and repeated everywhere, in the Colleges and even the Academies, on solemn occasions, that the French nation is the greatest and most sensible of all nations, and our literature the first of all literatures. I should wish him to content himself with saying that it is one of the finest, and to hint that the world did not begin and does not end with us.

I should wish that whilst telling of our good qualities

as a people, to men who are already sufficiently impressed with them, he should add, and sometimes prove by examples, that we also have a few faults; that in France what we have in the highest degree, is impetuousness and a soaring imagination, and what we lack, is stability and character; that this was lacking in the nobility of former days and might well be lacking in the people to-day, and that we should fortify ourselves in that direction, and be on our guard. In a word, to arouse and maintain the feeling of patriotism by enlightening it, without dropping into the national platitudes, which are the result of an infatuated and intoxicated ignorance, that is the spirit which I would like to see animating this humble but important branch of instruction.

After these two parallel Courses have been delivered, and whilst they are being delivered, one might introduce a much greater variety into the readings, and a useful variety. As things stand at present, many good and even excellent things, observe, cannot be read, because they would not be sufficiently appreciated and felt, for example, some excellent pages of Voltaire in history. They do not tell with sufficient directness, they do not find in the audience a sufficiently prepared ground of general knowledge to bear them. This general background once established, it would be possible to attach to it pieces written in a more sober, moderate, lighter manner, and one would not be forced to limit oneself, in historical quotations, to more showy authors who are rather strong in relief, and who, in spite of fire and sap, are not free from declamation. One could always have recourse from time to time to Michelet for good passages (for he has them), but even then one should bring in Voltaire as a corrective. Nothing is rarer than good taste, taking it in its exquisite sense, and I think that, in the present case, one should aim only at the sufficient, but at the same time never lose an occasion to encourage a love of the simple, the sensible, the elevated, that which is great without show. One might sometimes succeed in making the audience feel where the simple may be superior to what at first sight is more striking. To some vaunted chapter of a modern novel one might hold up as a contrast a story of Xavier de Maistre. The hearers would find that they wept at one and applauded the other. One would not

tell them so (this is a point where it would differ from a Course of lectures proper), but let them find it out for themselves.

At one time, in one and the same evening, one might associate things that are most analogous; at another time one might make use of contrast, and this contrast would often be a corrective. One day, after reading a page of Voltaire, into which an irreverent touch has found its way, one could read the Eulogy of General Drouot which we spoke of recently, and which would show that religion and patriotism are quite reconcilable, both in the warrior who forms the subject of the Eulogy, and in the orator who celebrates him.

After a passage which has exalted a little too much the military pride of the hearers, one might read them that fine letter of M. d'Argenson to Voltaire, written from the field of battle of Fontenoy, and ending with these words: 'But the floor of all this is human blood, shreds of human flesh'! This would show them that humanity as well as bravery existed under the old monarchy. One might follow this up with Mérimée's *Enlèvement d'une redoute*, which also exhibits military glory from its dark side. Thus, by a simple choice of pieces, and with a few words of explanation thrown in at intervals, one might make up a Course of literature both practical and in action.

But I do not know why I seem to be inventing and supposing, when nearly all this is being done at the present moment, and when I have before my eyes a list of readings already old, that M. Just Olivier and M. Émile Souvestre have been so obliging as to draw up for me. M. Souvestre has besides taken the trouble to note down the effect which the different pieces appeared to produce on the audience; we have thus a sort of scale in popular impressions, which does not fail to be instructive and curious. I may be permitted to dwell upon it.

M. Souvestre's audience[1] is one of the most complete and most homogeneous; it is already formed and accustomed to its reader. I have said that M. Souvestre most generally reads in the Conservatoire of Music, in the Faubourg Poissonnière. These readings began very

[1] M. Souvestre has died since, on July 6, 1854, of heart disease, a premature loss to literature and his friends.

shortly after the events of June, 1848, and one knows that the Conservatoire is not far from the Clos Saint-Lazare. There were among the hearers, then, many faces which might have been recognized as having taken part in the fighting. It is on this public, eight-ninths of which is composed of working men, that the reader has had to exercise an imperceptible, moral, affectionate influence, and he has been completely successful. For one of the first readings he chose a few extracts from the *Memoirs of Madame de La Rochejaquelein*, thinking it was well, in order to inspire a dislike for civil wars, to show by an example taken from a distant past, the frightful calamities they lead to. The reading produced a profound emotion, and such as he had desired. Other extracts, in which he presented in succession the battles of Agincourt, of Poitiers and Crécy, according to the old historians and chroniclers, seemed for a moment to shock the patriotism of the audience, and a member complained of it in a letter, which was respectful nevertheless. At the next meeting the reader replied to the letter, that every disaster has its cause, that one should not be afraid of seeking it and of probing the wounds of one's country; that the misfortunes of a mother are after all not a disgrace, that he had not come there to flatter patriotism, but to enlighten it. These words aroused, even in those who had at first taken offence, a feeling of cordiality and confidence, which has never since varied.

It requires much art to get all the possible moral good out of these readings, an honest and loyal art, which will bring home to the minds of the people the conviction of one's complete impartiality. One day when M. Souvestre, at the beginning, had ventured upon the pretty tale of Andrieux, *Le Procès du Sénat de Capoue*, where there is mention

> D'impertinents bavards, soi-disant orateurs,
> Des meilleurs citoyens ardents persécuteurs,

and ending with this line:

> Français, ce trait s'appelle un avis aux lecteurs!

on that day, to show that he had no systematic intention, he read, as a counterpart, a piece of Victor Hugo on

almsgiving, where the poor come in for their good share of sympathy.

To a curious observer who assists at these readings, the audience forms, as one may well imagine, a much more interesting spectacle than the reader. At this inclement season, in an unheated theatre like that of the Conservatoire, it would be difficult to gain a correct idea of what these meetings are in ordinary times; the audience is necessarily very reduced. When the weather is favourable the number of hearers will rise up to three hundred about; on bad evenings the number will fall to eighty or a hundred; it fluctuates between these two extremes. Among the workmen (if I may be pardoned these details), jewellers, designers for materials, mechanics carpenters and joiners furnish the greatest number. There are very few printers' compositors, either because they are engaged in the evening, or because, by reason of their profession, they have been surfeited all day with reading. In the spring some workmen come from a great distance, and some with their families.

At first sight one would not suspect the presence of so many working-men among the audience; the majority, indeed, have doffed the blouse from a feeling of self-respect, and also from consideration and respect for the things they come to hear and for the reader.

A perfect decorum reigns in the room before the reader's arrival: as soon as he enters, there is profound silence, and the slightest impressions are reflected, either in a still more attentive silence, or in a very perceptible thrill, as in the most practised audiences. When a comedy is read, faces beam with mirth, and at the good parts the laugh is not long coming. Here, by the way, are a few notes which I reproduce as I have received them from M. Souvestre, on the effect of the different readings:—

'Casimir Delavigne's poetry.—Appreciated.

'Jeanne d'Arc, Michelet's account.—Very effective.

'Molière.—I have never read complete plays (excepting *Le Dépit amoureux* and *Les Précieuses*). I analysed and gave the principal scenes, in such a way as to make a whole play known each time.—Always very effective.

'Corneille.—I have treated him in the same way as Molière; very effective.

'Racine.—The same method; not so effective'.

This might have been expected; it requires more education and culture to relish Racine; the power is not all on the surface as in Corneille, it is clothed and veiled. Those who best knew Napoleon remarked that, in the rapid literary education he had to improvise for himself after he had risen to power, he began by openly preferring Corneille; the appreciation for Racine came later, but it did come. He began as the people begin; he ended as cultivated and well-informed minds like to end. I will continue with these simple notes, which suggest more than one reflexion by the way:—

'La Fontaine's Fables.—They amuse; but the moral expressed by them sometimes puzzles the working-men; they look for the *lesson*. Florian's Fables, more direct in their progress and intention, give more pleasure perhaps'.

And in fact, the fable was for La Fontaine most frequently only a pretext for a story, a tale, a reverie; the moral adjusts itself as best it can at the end. Straightforward and logical minds (and every simple mind may easily be that), that count too much upon a true fable, may at times be perhaps a little disconcerted. I will continue:—

'Chateaubriand.—Very effective. I have analysed the *Martyrs* and read several episodes. I have read *Atala* in part.

'Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.—*La Chaumière indienne* gave great pleasure.

'Xavier de Maistre.—I have read *Le Lépreux* with success.

'Malherbe.—Le Brun (Ode on the ship *Le Vengeur*); great pleasure.

'Boileau.—Two epistles, two or three satires; little effect.

'Andrieux' verse tales.—Much applause.

'Paul-Louis Courier.—Though I had chosen the things of most general interest in his works, and those which savour least of the occasional kind, the effect was moderate. The delicate allusions did not tell. These Restoration politics are forgotten; besides, the laboured and artificial style perplexed the audience.

'Béranger.—A few songs (*Escousse et Lebras*, *Les Souvenirs du Peuple*, *Le Juif errant*, etc.); effective, but less so than I should have thought: the *refrain*, felicitous in singing, is disturbing when one reads.

'Ségur.—Fragments of the *Histoire de la Grande Armée*; very effective.

'Voltaire.—*History of Charles XII*, by extracts; tolerably effective'

I will not pursue any further this comparative scale of impressions. In these readings, observe, the test is reciprocal: in a certain measure one tests the work that is submitted; no less does one test the minds to which they are submitted. Too much artifice, too much art is prejudicial with minds that are fresh: too much simplicity is equally so; they are not astonished by it, and up to a certain point they need astonishment. Paul-Louis Courier fails his effect, because he is too artificial; Voltaire partly fails his effect, because he is too simple.

As a means of influence, nothing is more sovereign than example. The lives of celebrated men, of those who have made their way in the world and are the children of their works, of those men of whom Franklin offers the type, would form one of the most profitable readings. One could find ample material to draw upon in the history of men of science and learning, and artists. One should not forget, beside the men of talent who have risen from the people, those who have remained among the people, who, in spite of possessing genius and a gift, have not ceased to practise a trade. The difficulty, in such subjects, is to find a biography ready made, written with sufficient interest to be read consecutively without coldness. In such cases one is almost always obliged to cite the salient feature and to abridge the rest; that is to say, one is insensibily reduced to contribute something of one's own, as in a Course; and the proper conditions being preserved, I see no harm in that.

Biography, if well understood and rightly handled, is a sure instrument for initiating one into the history of men and times, even the most distant from us. The Life of Bayard, extracted by M. Souvestre from the original chronicle of the sixteenth century, produced on his hearers a strong emotion and made them admire the spirit of chivalry in the person of its last offshoot. Plutarch's Lives would likewise furnish a means of making known the indispensable part of antiquity. One might say to the people of Paris, for example: 'There was once a people with whom you have often been compared, but whom you as yet only imperfectly resemble. The Greeks loved learning, they loved it as you do, and much more than you do. One day, voyaging on board ship, a Greek, a man of the people, had been listening for some time to

some men of learning, philosophers, who were talking of intellectual matters: suddenly he threw himself into the sea. He was rescued, and they asked him why he wished to drown himself; he replied that it was done in despair, because he had obtained a glimpse of such beautiful things, and felt that he was shut out from them by his ignorance'. One might say to them: 'Every free Greek could read. After the taking of Corinth, the Roman General, to distinguish the children of free condition from the others, commanded each of them to write a few words. One of the children immediately wrote those lines of Homer, in which Ulysses regrets that he did not die on the field of battle and that he has survived the heroes, his fellow-countrymen: *Thrice and four times happy are they who died fighting on the fields of Ilion*! This boy, on the day of his country's ruin, wrote these lines under the eyes of the victor, and the proud Roman could not restrain a tear'. One might say again: 'The Greeks loved poetry so much, that it mitigated even warfare, so cruel with them. The Athenians, vanished in Sicily, redeemed their lives and liberty, or they obtained food in the country districts, by reciting verses of the great poet Euripides, whom the Sicilians loved more than any other. On their return to Athens these freed soldiers visited the poet and thanked him with effusion for having saved their lives. The same Euripides saved his country on a day of disaster. Athens was taken by Lysander, and the most terrible resolutions were about to prevail in the Council of the allies; it was mooted to raze the city of Minerva. But behold, at a banquet, some one among the guests has the happy idea of singing one of the most beautiful choruses of Euripides; and immediately all these wild conquerors feel their hearts moved, and it seemed to them that it would be a crime to exterminate a city which had produced such men'. These things one might find on every page of Plutarch, and he alone would furnish enough to render living and palpable by examples all the antiquity which one needs. One might even, I am sure, if one knew how to set about it, succeed in making the audience weep with Homer's Priam, and applaud Demosthenes.

To limit ourselves and return to the actual fact, Public Readings exist in Paris, they commenced in apparently

unfavourable circumstances, and they have triumphed over them. Hitherto they have offered no difficulties, and already show good results, which are only an earnest of what might be expected of them. They are a germ which evidently only asks to live. I have been told that the enlightened men at the Ministry of Public Instruction to whose province they belong are thinking of developing and perfecting them. It was added that they incline to the idea of concentrating them in a single place, in order to obtain a more striking result. If such were indeed the plan, I think it would be a mistake. One would have more frontage, but less foundation. Let us not imitate the Governments which have preceded, and which too often, having built a specious frontage, have stopped there, have shown it to the Chambers and thought they had done everything needful. The places assigned to the Readings are a very important point, which may act not only upon their success, but upon their character. It is advisable not to go too far in the direction of bringing these Readings to the workmen's own homes, to their quarter (they do not like that), and at the same time not to go too far from them. The Palais-Royal is a convenient spot; but it cannot be the only spot without disadvantage. Its public is of too haphazard, too mixed, too occasional a character. Four or five other places are absolutely necessary. The Conservatoire of Music is very well chosen. The School of Medicine is likewise a good centre. It is not my business to discuss these details, but the choice of places is of supreme importance. The Directors of public institutions often show too little alacrity to welcome the Readings; it is for the Government, on whom they depend, to overcome this illiberal opposition.[1]

A general symptom remains to be verified, which one would be blamable not to take account of: the spirit of the working-class in Paris *is improving*. If you ask me what I mean by this word, I will reply that I understand that improvement in a sense which cannot be disputed

[1] The convenience of times is not less important than the choice of places. Thus, it is a pity that at the Lycée Charlemagne M. Just Olivier should be obliged to begin at seven in the evening, that is to say at an hour when the workmen have hardly finished their day. The best time is from eight to a quarter past nine in the evening.

by honest men of any party or any shade of opinion. Improvement, for the labouring classes, does not mean, according to my idea, to have such or such political opinions, to incline to this or that social point of view (in this respect I would admit many disagreements), it means simply to understand that they erred if they trusted to any other means except regular labour; it means to return to those means and to desire everything that may strengthen and increase them. When the greater part of a population has arrived at that stage, and when the violent are advised little by little to keep themselves apart and isolated from the mass, I say that the mass is improving, and that this is the moment for far-seeing statesmen to act upon them by honest, moral, sympathetic methods. The Evening Readings, within their humble frame, are all this. The distinguished men who have so far devoted themselves, through inclination or zeal, to these quite gratuitious functions, are certainly doing a very estimable work; but there is something that is still more estimable (they will excuse me if I think so, and they have thought so before me), and that is to see, as at the Conversatoire, working men, their day's labour finished, coming from Passy or Neuilly to attend, at eight o'clock in the evening, a literary reading. That shows a moral disposition worthy of esteem and almost of respect, which one would be to blame not to encourage and minister to, when it spontaneously presents itself.

I have known a time when we were far from thinking of such things; that was the good old time of the *Athénées*, of the *Cénacles*, of select literary reunions, among friends, with closed doors. Over the door of the sanctuary one might have read the inscription: *Odi profanum vulgus! Away with the profane!* The reign of these delicate theories, of these refined enjoyments of the intellect and vanity, is past. We must frankly attack this new and difficult work, we must henceforth reckon with all, extract from the good sense of all the best, the most applicable to noble subjects, that it contains, popularize beautiful things, appear even to debase them a little, in order the more easily to raise the common level up to them. At that price alone can we show ourselves entirely worthy of loving them in themselves and of comprehending them; for

the only means of saving them henceforth and of assuring in some degree their existence as a tradition, is to make everybody more or less interested in them and to place them in the safe keeping of all.

ALFRED DE MUSSET[1]

Monday, January 28, 1850.

In a few days there is to appear a Collection of the New Poems that M. Alfred de Musset wrote from 1840 to 1849; his preceding Collection, so charming, comprised only the poems composed up to 1840. A good number of lyrical and other pieces (songs, sonnets, epistles) have been since published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and elsewhere: these form the new Collection, with the addition of a few unpublished pieces. They provide me with an excuse, which after all I should not need, to speak of M. Alfred de Musset, and to appraise, not in detail this time, but in its entirety and its general features, the character of his talent, the rank he holds in our poetry, and the influence he has had upon it.

About ten years ago M. de Musset sent to M. de Lamartine a *Letter* in verse, in which he addressed for the first time that prince of the poets of the day, and in his turn made him that sort of public and direct declaration which the singer of Elvire had long been accustomed to receive from whoever entered the career, but which M. de Musset, setting etiquette at nought, had delayed longer than any other to bring him. The poet of *Namouna* and *Rolla* said to him then in very fine verses that after having thought he doubted, after having denied and blasphemed, a sudden light had flashed within him :—

> Poète, je t'écris pour te dire que j'aime,
> Qu'un rayon de soleil est tombé jusqu' à moi,
> Et qu'en un jour de deuil et de douleur suprême,
> Les pleurs que je versais m'ont fait penser à toi.

1 *Poésies Nouvelles de M. Alfred de Musset* (Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1850).

In the midst of his passion and his suffering, a feeling of celestial elevation, an idea of immortality, he said, had been awakened in his soul; the *angels of sorrow* had spoken to him, and he naturally thought of the man who had first opened up those sacred springs of inspiration in our poetry. M. de Musset recalled, as appropriate to the occasion, the lines that M. de Lamartine, as a young man, addressed to Lord Byron on his departure for Greece; and, without aspiring to any ambitious comparison, he begged him to receive him to-day with his offering as he himself had been once received by the *great Byron*.

A newspaper has just published the reply in verse which M. de Lamartine sent to M. de Musset, a reply which dates back to 1840, and which, appearing to-day, almost looks like a piece of injustice; for M. de Musset has not for many a day been on that footing of a beginner in poetry on which M. de Lamartine pretended to see him. Evidently, he took M. de Musset too much at his own modest valuation; he had forgotten that at that date of 1840, this *fair-haired boy*, this *young man with a heart of wax*, as he calls him, had written the *Nuit de Mai* and the *Nuit d'Octobre*, those poems which will live as long as *Le Lac*, which are more passionate, and almost as pure. M. de Lamartine's first judgment in poetry is superficial; I am reminded of his first judgments on Petrarch, on André Chénier. In the poem to M. de Musset he is thinking only of the singer of the *Marquise* and the *Andalouse*. He tells him things which are not very pleasant to hear, when another than oneself says them. In the *Confessions d'un Enfant du siècle*, and in many another place, M. de Musset had confessed to many of those things which poetry in our century authorizes and with which it adorns itself. M. de Lamartine makes them the text of a lecture; he cites himself as an example, and ends, as is his wont, with insensibly proposing himself as a model. That is what one exposes oneself to when one addresses a tribute to these illustrious men if one follows too closely upon their heels. M. de Lamartine himself had not been so well received by Lord Byron as M. de Musset seems to think: Byron, in his *Memoirs*, speaks very lightly of that fine epistle *sur l'Homme*, of the first *Méditations*, as of the work of an *individual* who thought proper to compare him with the devil and call

him *singer of hell.* In short, we must not expect those illustrious predecessors to be entirely just and attentive when we belong to their race; they are too full of themselves. How would Lord Byron, I pray you, have received the advances of the poet Keats, that young wounded eagle that fell so early, whom he always treats so cavalierly, from the height of his disdain or his pity? How did M. de Chateaubriand himself, who preserved appearances so well, at the beginning judge M. de Lamartine the poet, if not as a man of great talent and of melody, who had been successful with the women and in the drawing-rooms? Poets, go then straight to the public for your patent, and to those within that public who feel, whose minds and hearts are free, to the younger men, or to the men who were young yesterday and are now mature, to those who read you and sing you, to those who will read you again. It is among them that you must make for yourselves faithful, sincere friends, who will love you for your good qualities; who admire you not as a matter of fashion, and who will some day defend you against the fashion, when it changes.

M. de Musset entered the arena before he was twenty years of age, and from the beginning he tried to distinguish himself in a striking manner from the other poets then in renown. That there might be no confusion, he assumed from the first day a mask, a fancy costume, a manner; he disguised himself as a Spaniard, as an Italian, without ever having seen Spain or Italy: hence certain disadvantages which continued for some time. I am certain that, gifted as he was with an original power and a genius quite his own, even if he had made his appearance in a more simple fashion and without aiming at so much singularity, he would soon have come to distinguish himself manifestly from the poets whose proximity he shrank from, and whose character, sentimental or melancholy, solemn or grave, was so different from his. He had the sentiment of raillery which the others lacked, and a craving for true passion which they only rarely had.

> Mes premiers vers sont d'un enfant,
> Les seconds, d'un adolescent,

he said, sitting in judgment upon himself. M. de Musset, then, performed his early exploits, but he performed them

with a brilliancy, an insolence of verve (as Regnier says). with a more than virile audacity, with the charm and effrontery of a page: he was Chérubin at a masked ball, acting the part of a Don Juan. This first manner, in which we might follow up the vein of affectations and the track of reminiscences, is crowned by two poems (if we may call poem what has no composition), by two marvellous divagations, *Namouna* and *Rolla*, in which, under pretext of having to tell a story which he is continually forgetting, the poet exhales all his dreams, his fantasies, and he gives full scope to his soaring imagination. Wit, nudities and crudities, lyricism, a grace and delicacy adorable at times, the loftiest poetry apropos of nothing in particular, debauchery flaunting itself in the face of the ideal, sudden whiffs of lilac which bring back freshness, here and there a remnant of *chic* (to speak in the language of the studio), all this is mixed up together and forms the strangest and assuredly the most unprecedented compound, that had ever been produced hitherto by French poetry, that honest maid who had once been married to M. de Malherbe, being herself already on the decline. We may say that the whole of Alfred de Musset the poet is found in *Namouna*, with his faults and his qualities. But the latter are great, and of such an order, that they redeem the whole.

Lord Byron wrote to his publisher, Murray, speaking of his Don Juan: 'You say that *one half* is very good: you are wrong; for, if it were, it would be the finest poem in existence. *Where* is the poetry of which *one half* is good'? Byron was right to speak thus for himself and his peers; but there is opposed to and above him the school of Virgil, of the man who wished to burn his poem, because he did not think it perfect enough in every particular. It was the same Byron who likened himself (in poetry) to the tiger, who if he misses the first spring returns growling to his den. In general, our modern poets, Béranger excepted, have only aimed at poetry of the first spring, and what they have not attained at once, they have missed.

I may say with a good conscience then that there is in the poems of *Namouna* and *Rolla* a good half which does not correspond with the other half. The very beautiful part of *Namouna*, that where the poet exhibits his

full power, is in the second Canto. It is there that M. de Musset unfolds his theory of *Don Juan* and opposes the two kinds of *roués* who, according to him, divide the stage of the world between them: the heartless *roué*, without an ideal, all selfishness and vanity, hardly plucking the flower of pleasure, aiming only at inspiring love without feeling it, *Lovelace;* and the other type of *roué*, lovable and loving, almost innocent, passing through all his inconstancies to reach an ideal which flies from him, thinking that he loves, his own dupe even when he seduces, and changing only because he loves no longer. That is, according to M. de Musset, the true, the all poetic *Don Juan*,

> Que personne n'a fait, que Mozart a rêvé,
> Qu'Hoffmann a vu passer, au son de la musique,
> Sous un éclair divin de sa nuit fantastique,
> Admirable portrait qu'il n'a point achevé,
> Et que de notre temps Shakspeare aurait trouvé.

And M. de Musset will try to paint him with the freshest, the most enchanting colours, with colours which recall (God pardon me!) those of Milton portraying his happy couple in Eden. He shows him handsome, twenty years of age, seated on the edge of a meadow, beside his sleeping mistress, and like an angel guarding her slumber:

> Le voilà, jeune et beau, sous le ciel de la France . . .
> Portant sur la nature un cœur plein d'espérance,
> Aimant, aimé de tous, ouvert comme une fleur;
> Si candide et si frais que l'Ange d'innocence
> Baiserait sur son front la beauté de son cœur.
> Le voilà, regardez, devinez-lui sa vie.
> Quel sort peut-on prédire à cet enfant du ciel?
> L'amour, en l'approchant, jure d'être éternel!
> Le hasard pense à lui. . . .

And all that follows. From the poetic point of view, nothing could be more charming, more happily invented and executed. Yet, whatever the poet may do, vain are his efforts to compose a unique *Don Juan*, contradictory and living, almost innocent in his crimes; this *candid corruptor* does not exist. The poet has only succeeded in calling up by his magic, in clothing for a moment with life an impossible abstraction. Words do not quarrel on paper, as somebody has remarked. Such virtues and

such vices thus combined and contrasted in a single being are all very well to write, and especially to sing about, but they are neither humanly nor naturally true. And then, why put before us that absolute alternative of having to choose between the two kinds of *roués*? Would poetry exist any less, oh poet, if there were no *roués* at all? In the sacred group of Virgil's Elysian Fields, where figure the greatest of mortals, the pious poets are placed in the first rank, that is to say, the quite human poets, who have given forth with emotion and tenderness the broad accents of nature:

> Quique pii vates et Phoebo digna locuti.

How far such subtilties were from approaching these lofty and wholesome thoughts.

Here are reservations enough, and yet there are in *Namouna* three or four hundred lines in succession which are entirely out of the common. Play the incredulous, turn them over and over, apply the scalpel, seek a quarrel with your pleasure, you may find a few blots, some glaring tones; but, if you have the true poetic feeling and if you are sincere, you will admit that the inspiration is strong and powerful; the god, say the demon if you like, has passed over it.

The younger generation of men, who in such a matter are not easily deceived, felt it at once. When the poems of *Namouna* and *Rolla* had only appeared in the *Revues*, and had not yet been collected in book form, students of law, of medicine, knew them by heart from beginning to end, and recited them to their friends, newly arrived in the capital. Many still know that splendid beginning of *Rolla*, that apostrophe to the Christ, that other apostrophe to Voltaire (for there are many apostrophes), especially that ravishing slumber of the fifteen-year old girl:

> Oh! la fleur de l'Éden, pourquoi l'as-tu fanée,
> Insouciante enfant, belle Ève aux blonds cheveux? . . .

I am speaking of the young generation of twenty years ago. Then they recited the whole of these young poems, now one is perhaps beginning to make a selection.

After *Namouna* and *Rolla*, M. de Musset had still a

progress to make. He had gone as far as it was possible to go in the attempt and the anticipation of passion without having been touched by the passion itself. But, by dint of speaking of it, of giving himself the desire and the torment of it, patience! it was destined to come. In spite of his insults and his blasphemies, his heart was worthy of it. He who had in burning stanzas stigmatized that odious and selfish Lovelace might have exhibited some pretensions to being a *roué*; but at bottom he had the heart of an honest poet. For, remark it well, even in the author of *Namouna*, coxcombry (if I may venture to call it so) is only skin deep: he throws it off as soon as his poetry becomes ardent.

One day then, M. de Musset loved. He has said and repeated it too often in verse, and this passion has become too public, has been too much proclaimed on both sides, and in every tone, for us not to have the right to state it here in simple prose. It is besides never a dishonour for a woman to have been loved and sung by a true poet, even if she afterwards appears to have been cursed by him. This malediction itself is a last tribute. A clear-sighted confidant might say: 'Take care, you will love her again!'

This love was the great event of M. de Musset's life; I am only speaking of his poetical life. His talent suddenly became purified, ennobled; at one moment the sacred flame appeared to cast away every impure alloy. In the poems he produced under this powerful star, almost all his faults disappear; his qualities, hitherto scattered and as if in shreds, meet again and rejoin, group themselves in a vigorous and sorrowful harmony. The four pieces which M. de Musset has entitled *Nights*, are little poems which display composition and thought, and attain the high water mark of his lyric talent. The *Nuit de Mai* and the *Nuit d'Octobre* are the first in respect of outline and the never-failing vein of poetry, for the expression of violent and undisguised passion. But the other two, the *Nuit de Décembre* and the *Nuit d'Août*, are also delicious, the latter for its movement and sentiment, the other for its charm and the flexibility of its turn. All four together form a work which is animated by the same feeling, and which has its harmonies, its skilfully contrived proportions.

I have read again side by side with them the two celebrated poems of Milton's youth, the *Allegro* and above all the *Penseroso*. But, in these compositions of a supreme and somewhat cold beauty, the poet has not the passion in himself; he awaits the movement from without, he successively receives his impressions from nature; he contents himself with bringing to them a grave, noble, tender, but calm disposition, like a lightly ruffled mirror. The *Penseroso* is the master-piece of the meditative and contemplative poem; it resembles a magnificent oratorio, in which prayer slowly rises by degrees to the Eternal. The marks of difference from the present subject are self-evident. I am not instituting a comparison. Let us not displace the august names from their sphere. All that is fine in Milton is beyond compare; one feels in it the calm familiarity with the higher regions and the continuity of power. Still, in the more terrestrial but more human *Nights* of M. de Musset, the inspiration, the flame that colours, the breath that embalms nature, spring from within; or rather the charm consists in the blending, in the alliance of the two sources of impressions, that is to say of a sorrow so deep and of a soul still so open to vivid impressions. This poet, wounded to the heart, who cries with such real sobs, has his returns of youth and as it were his vernal intoxications. He is more sensible than before to the innumerable beauties of the universe, to the verdure, the flowers, the morning sun's rays, the song of birds, and he bears as fresh as at fifteen his nosegay of lilies of the valley and eglantine. M. de Musset's muse will always have these returns, even at his least good moments, but nowhere is this natural freshness so happily wedded as here with bleeding passion and sincere sorrow. Poetry, that chaste comforter, is here treated almost with veneration, with tenderness.

How much will remain of the poets of this present time? He would be bold who would pretend to allot the prizes and make the division to-day. But time marches so quickly in our days, that we may already perceive its different effects on works which, at their birth, appeared equally alive. Take those works which were most loudly greeted and applauded at their appearance: how many passages are already dead, how many colours already paled and faded! One of the poets of whom most will

live, Béranger, said to me one day: 'You others, you began too young and before maturity'. He might well say so. It is not everybody that has the good fortune to meet with obstacles which hinder and restrain until the very moment when you can show the fruit already and still the flower. Béranger had the wit (he or his Fay) to let the poetry of the Empire pass by before blossoming; if he had calculated his life, he could not have succeeded better. The others, a little sooner, a little later, all very young, some of them mere boys, entered the lists pell-mell, at random. What we may say without risk, is that there resulted from this competition of talents, during several seasons, a very rich lyric poetry, richer than France had suspected hitherto, but a very unequal and very mixed poetry. The majority of the poets yielded without check or restraint to all the instincts of their nature, and also to all the pretensions of their pride, or even the follies of their vanity. Faults and qualities sprang up in all licence, and posterity will have to do the sorting. One feels that it is already being done. Which among the poems composed from 1819 to 1830 may to-day be read again with emotion, with pleasure? I merely put the question and have no intention of deciding it, nor of closely following that faint yet perceptible line which, in the illustrious men most sure of themselves, already divides the dead from the living. Poets of to-day, there are three or four among you who dispute the sceptre, each of whom thinks himself the first! Who knows which of them will have the last say with our indifferent grandchildren? Some of your accents will certainly reach posterity: that will be your honour; the rest will be covered with a kindly oblivion. Nothing complete will survive of the poets of the present time. M. de Musset will not escape this fate, of which we shall perhaps not have so much reason to complain; for there are accents of his which will carry the further, we may believe, and will penetrate the future all the better for arriving unaccompanied and unmixed. These are the accents of pure passion, and especially in the *Nuit de Mai* and the *Nuit d'Octobre* has he breathed them.

There exists quite a little school of poets who have begun to imitate M. de Musset. What of him have they imitated? What imitators always take, the form, the

superficial, the free tone, the cavalier-like gesture, the dashing faults, all things which, at least with him, are borne with a certain grace and *careless ease*, and which they have set about copying religiously. They have copied his vocabulary of gallant names, *Manon, Ninon, Marion*, his jingle of lorettes and marquises. They have copied even his feeble rhymes and his affectations of carelessness. They have caught the fashion and the trick; but the flame, the passion, the elevation and the lyricism, they have refrained, and for good reasons, from borrowing.

The French public is nevertheless sometimes singular in its judgments on poetry. I spoke just now of those of the younger generations who first admired M. de Musset with sincerity and frankness. One could write a piquant chapter of manners on the persons of fashion, the second-hand enthusiasts, who have adopted him with infatuation, the same who, twenty-five years ago, would have admired alexandrines, on the ground that they were cast in the mould of Racine's lines, and who will to-day cry up the smallest trifles of the brilliant poet, and place them on a level with the best and the really good things he has written. It was not at the moment when M. de Musset rose to his highest that this worldly vogue declared itself; it only came after, as ordinarily happens, but it exists. He is the favourite poet of the day; the boudoir has outbid the law school. Those who belong to a very young period, to a certain quite recent date, usually approach modern poetry through Musset. The mother does not yet advise her daughter to read him; the husband makes his young wife read them in the first year of marriage. I think I one day saw a volume of his poems even slipped among the wedding presents. That is an amusing side for the observer, and by no means disagreeable to the poet Only, let him hasten in this to enjoy, and not place too much reliance upon it.

Among the lyrical poems which have escaped from M. de Musset since his *Nights* and which have just been collected a few are worthy of remark. I distinguish one with the title *Soirée perdue*, where he has rather gracefully interwoven a motif of André Chénier with a thought of Molière, a satire *Sur la Paresse*, in which the poet has been inspired by a reading of Regnier; a pretty tale, *Simone*, which has reminiscences of Boccaccio and La Fontaine; but above

all a *Souvenir* full of charm and passion still, in which the inspiration has come from himself. The poet visited some places once dear to him, some forest, that of Fontainebleau perhaps, where he had spent happy days. His friends feared the effect upon him of this pilgrimage and the awakening of memories. There is no greater sorrow, Dante said, than to recall happy days when one is in misery. But M. de Musset experienced the contrary, and this awakening of the past which they feared for him and which he feared himself, he found on the contrary, as he tells us, comforting and sweet. I beg to quote here a few stanzas of this poem, in order to rest the mind, after this rather disparate study, upon a few entirely pure notes—

J'espérais bien pleurer, mais je croyais souffrir,
En osant te revoir, place à jamais sacrée,
O la plus chère tombe et la plus ignorée
Où dorme un souvenir!

Que redoutiez-vous donc de cette solitude?
Et pourquoi, mes amis, me preniez-vous la main,
Alors qu'une si douce et si vieille habitude
Me montrait ce chemin?

Les voilà ces coteaux, ces bruyères fleuries,
Et ces pas *argentins* sur le sable muet,
Ces sentiers amoureux, remplis de causeries,
Où son bras m'enlaçait.

Les voilà ces sapins à la sombre verdure,
Cette gorge profonde aux nonchalants détours,
Ces sauvages amis dont l'antique murmure
A bercé mes beaux jours.

Les voilà, ces buissons où toute ma jeunesse,
Comme un essaim d'oiseaux, chante au bruit de mes pas;
Lieux charmants, beau désert où passa ma maîtresse
Ne m'attendiez-vous pas?

Ah! laissez-les couler, elles me sont bien chères,
Ces larmes que soulève un cœur encor blessé!
Ne les essuyez pas, laissez sur mes paupières
Ce voile du passé!

Je ne viens point jeter un regret inutile
Dans l'écho de ces bois témoins de mon bonheur:
Fière est cette forêt dans sa beauté tranquille,
Et fier aussi mon cœur

Que celui-là se livre à des plaintes amères
Qui s'agenouille et prie au tombeau d'un ami.
Tout respire en ces lieux ; les fleurs des cimetières
Ne poussent point ici.

Voyez ! la lune monte à travers ces ombrages.
Ton regard tremble encor, belle reine des nuits ;
Mais du sombre horizon déjà tu te dégages,
Et tu t'épanouis.

Ainsi de cette terre, humide encor de pluie,
Sortent, sous tes rayons, tous les parfums du jour :
Aussi calme, aussi pur, de mon âme attendrie
Sort mon ancien amour.

Que sont-ils devenus, les chagrins de ma vie ?
Tout ce qui m'a fait vieux est bien loin maintenant ;
Et rien qu'en regardant cette vallée amie,
Je redeviens enfant.

O puissance du temps ! ô légères années !
Vous emportez nos pleurs, nos cris et nos regrets ;
Mais la pitié vous prend, et sur nos fleurs fanées
Vous ne marchez jamais.

Tout mon cœur te bénit, bonté consolatrice !
Je n'aurais jamais cru que l'on pût tant souffrir
D'une telle blessure, et que sa cicatrice
Fût si douce à sentir.

Loin de moi les vains mots, les frivoles pensées,
Des vulgaires douleurs linceul accoutumé,
Que viennent étaler sur leurs amours passées
Ceux qui n'ont point aimé !

Dante, pourquoi dis-tu qu'il n'est pire misère
Qu'un souvenir heureux dans les jours de douleur ?
Quel chagrin t'a dicté cette parole amère,
Cette offense au malheur ?

En est-il donc moins vrai que la lumière existe,
Et faut-il l'oublier du moment qu'il fait nuit ?
Est-ce bien toi, grande âme immortellement triste,
Est-ce toi qui l'as dit ?

Non, par ce pur flambeau dont la splendeur m'éclaire,
Ce blasphème vanté ne vient pas de ton cœur.
Un souvenir heureux est peut-être sur terre
Plus vrai que le bonheur.

That, to be frank, is what I love in M. de Musset, and not by any means those little verses *Sur trois marches de marbre rose*, and other knick-knacks which savour of the Regency.

M. de Musset's taste has reached its maturity, and it would be a fine thing if his talent were henceforth at the service of his taste and indulged in no weaknesses. After so many essays and experiments in every direction, after trying to love so many things in order to find out what is the only and supreme thing that deserves to be loved, that is to say, the truth in its simplicity and at the same time clothed in beauty, it is not astonishing that at the moment when we return to the latter and recognize it, we find ourselves in its presence less keen and more wearied than we were in the presence of his idols. However, genius in him has its revivals and springs of youth of which M. de Musset has more than once known the secret, and which he has not yet exhausted. For some years his talent has been exhibiting itself before the eyes of the public in a new form, and he has triumphantly passed through a rather hazardous ordeal. Those delicate sketches, those graceful Proverbs which he did not write for the stage, have suddenly become charming little comedies rising up and walking before us. The success of his *Caprice* has redounded to the honour, I am not afraid of saying so, of the public, and has shown that there still exists a delicate literary emotion for any one who is able to awaken it. He has seen the circle of his admirers widened as if by magic. Many minds that would not have thought of going to him for his lyrical talent have learned to appreciate him in this facile and airy form. He has enjoyed more than ever the approbation of men of the world, and the young women; he has roused the anger of grotesque and coarse critics: nothing has been wanting to make his favour complete. I do not wish it to be implied that I am extravagantly fond of *Louison*; it is only a bluette. M. de Musset the dramatic poet has still much to learn. On the stage, a happy situation, a witty dialogue, are not sufficient; invention, fertility, development are wanting, and above all action, to consummate, as has been said, this *work of the devil*. But it is time to finish, and without asking too much of him, without being more ceremonious than M. de Musset himself, I will end with a line of his which cuts short many reasonings—

Que dis-je? tel qu'il est, le monde l'aime encore.

M. GUIZOT[1]

Monday, February 4, 1850.

M. GUIZOT has twice had his say, as a writer, since February 1848: the first time, in January 1849, through his pamphlet, *De la Démocratie en France*; the second time, in these latter days, through the *Discourse* in question, which has a double purpose. This *Discourse* is, in fact, intended to serve as an introduction to a new edition of the *History of the Revolution in England*, which is appearing at this moment; but it also has an unequivocal intention, and as it were a direct reflexion upon present politics. In expressly dealing with this question: *Why was the Revolution in England successful*? the eminent historian evidently provokes every thinking reader to ask himself this other question: 'Why has the Revolution in France miscarried hitherto? Why, at least, has it not succeeded in the same sense as that of England, why is it still seeking its settlement'?

If M. Guizot's *Discourse* were purely political, I should pass it by as not being within my province, faithful to my rôle and my inclination, which agree to confine themselves to literature; but this *Discourse* is political only in its direction and its aim; in form and appearance it is purely historical, and as such I cannot neglect it without appearing to miss an occasion and a seasonable one. It is impossible for the journalistic critic, who most frequently has to look about him to create subjects susceptible of interest, to elude such important ones when he meets them face to face. If I should pass over this *Discourse* in silence and discuss a book of poetry, a novel, new or old, one might be justified in thinking that literary criticism

[1] *Discourse on the History of the Revolution in England.* By M. Guizot (1850).

is drawing back, that it acknowledges itself to be frivolous to a certain point, that there are subjects which it refrains from as being too imposing or too thorny; and that is never the light in which I have regarded this criticism, light no doubt and agreeable as far as it can be, but firm and serious when necessary, and as much as necessary.

Yet (and I will frankly confess it at once, in order to feel more at my ease afterwards), I have felt a momentary embarrassment on finding myself behindhand in expressing a direct opinion on a work whose bearing is so actual and, in consequence, upon a distinguished man about whom there is so much to say, and whom one cannot treat in a half-hearted way. M. Guizot's works form quite a chain; one cannot touch one link without moving, without shaking the whole. And then, we have here really to do with a writer! M. Guizot is not one of those men who divide themselves up, and of whom one can say: I will speak of the historian, of the man of letters, without touching upon the politician. No, it must be acknowledged to his honour, and that has been one of the causes of his personal importance, that he possesses unity; literature, history itself, have never been to him more than a means, an instrument of action, of instruction, of influence. He early adopted certain ideas, certain systems, and by every means, by the pen, by the tongue, in the professor's chair, in the speaker's tribune, in office and out of office, he has neglected nothing to make them prevail and to naturalize them in our country. And at this moment again what is he doing? Fallen yesterday, to-day he again raises his banner; only, he raises it in historical form. Once more he is drawing up his ideas and his reasons in battle array, as if he had not been beaten. To come to the end of these precautions, which all the same were indispensable, I will not make a pretence of forgetting that M. Guizot has counted for much, that he has weighed very heavily, in our destinies. The accident of February, that immense catastrophe in which we were all concerned and which has stranded us all, will be present to my memory. I should lie if I said that this last lesson in history does not supplement for me all the others that we owe to M. Guizot, that it does not complete and correct them, and confirm me in certain judgments which I will try here to express as fittingly as possible.

M. Guizot is one among the men of this time who, early and on every occasion, have worked most, have written most, and on all sorts of subjects, one of those whose information is most varied and most extensive, who know most languages, ancient and modern, most of Belles-Lettres, and yet he is not a *littérateur* properly speaking, in the exact sense which this word conveys to me. Napoleon wrote to his brother Joseph, then King of Naples, who was very fond of men of letters: 'You associate too much with men of letters and learning. They are coquettes with whom one should maintain a gallant intercourse, and of whom one should never dream of making either a wife or a minister'. That is true of many men of letters, of some even of those whom we have seen, in our days, in the Ministry. But that is true neither of M. Guizot nor of M. Thiers. Both of them are politicians who began by being writers; they have passed through literature, they return to it when occasion calls, they honour it by their works; but they do not belong to the family of *littérateurs* strictly speaking, to that race of men who have their special qualities and faults. M. Guizot perhaps belongs to it less than any other. There is no mind to which that word *coquette* used by Napoleon could less apply; his is a mind which, in everything, attaches least importance to form, to shape. Literature has never been his end, but his means. His is not the ambition of the literary man, in the sense that he is curious, absorbed, touchy, easily irritated, easily amused and comforted. He does nothing futile, nothing useless. In everything he goes to the fact, to the purpose, to the main point. When he writes, he does not trouble himself about a chimerical perfection; he aims at saying well what he wishes to say, as he wishes to say it; he does not seek after a better that delays and wastes. He is not enamoured of an ideal he longs to realize. With a genius for execution, he gathers with vigour, with ardour, his powers, his ideas, and resolutely sets to work, careless of form, often attaining it by the nerve and decision of his thought. When a work is done, he seldom returns to it; he does not resume it in order to revise it at leisure, to retouch and caress it, to repair the inexact or weak parts, the imperfections of a first wording; he passes on to another. He thinks of the present and the morrow.

Such he was at his débuts, before being in power, such in the intervals of his political life. From the advent of the Restauration, he felt that, under a non-military government which admitted the right of discussion and speech, he was of those whose natural vocation and merit called them to play an important part in the affairs and deliberations of the country. Whilst still writing much, both from inclination and an honourable necessity, he said to himself that he was one of those who become ministers and govern. From the very first day, his eye fixed itself upon a high place, and he prepared himself energetically to reach it.

Awaiting the hour, however, when he should become an orator and minister, he taught at the Sorbonne; he was the greatest professor of history we have had. He has founded a school; this is the reigning school, it reigns in part over those even who think they are in opposition to it. In his *Essays on the History of France*, in his *History of Civilization in Europe* and *in France*, M. Guizot has developed his principles and his points of views. More precise than the Germans, more generalizing than the English, he became European through his writings before he became so in his character as a public man. From the first day that he set foot in history, M. Guizot brought to it his instinct and his habits of mind: he aspired to regulate, to organize it. His first design was to take and follow, through that vast ocean of past events, a definite direction, without on that account narrowing himself, and without detracting from the diversity of the whole. To show his impartiality, to admit all the constituent elements of history, the royal, the aristocratic, the communal, the ecclesiastical element, to exclude none henceforth, on condition of their allowing themselves to be drawn up and made to march under one law, that was his ambition. It was vast, and if we were to judge by the effect obtained, M. Guizot has been successful. He has been praised according to his deserts. He has not been combated as much as he might have been. Daunou alone offered him some judicious but timid opposition. No bold spirit came, in the name of the school of Hume and Voltaire, in the name of the school of good sense and experience, in the name of human humility, to unroll before him the objections which would not in any respect have

detracted from his vigorous merits as a thinker and classifier, which would have allowed many positive portions of his work to subsist, but which would have raised a few doubts with regard to the ground of his exorbitant pretension.

I am one of those who doubt, in fact, whether it is given to man to embrace, with such width and certainty, the causes and sources of his own history in the past: it costs him so much labour to attain to a very imperfect comprehension of it in the present, to keep himself from continual error! The following very ingenious comparison was made by St. Augustine. Supposing that a single syllable of the poem of the *Iliad* were for a moment endowed with life and soul: could this syllable, placed as it is, understand the meaning and general plan of the poem? At the very most it might understand the meaning of the line of which it forms part, and of the three or four preceding lines. This syllable, endowed for a moment with life, is man; and you come and tell him that he has but to exert his will in order to comprehend the totality of the things that have passed away on this earth, of which most have vanished without leaving any monuments or traces behind them, others only such incomplete and mutilated remains!

This argument is not addressed to M. Guizot alone, but to the whole doctrinaire school of which he has been the mouthpiece and the most active and influential originator. It is addressed to many other schools besides, which think themselves distinct from this one and have run aground on the same reef. The danger is very real, above all for whoever wishes to pass from history to politics. History, observe, thus seen from a distance, undergoes a singular metamorphosis, and produces an illusion, the worst of all illusions, that which makes one think it governed by reason. In this more or less philosophical arrangement which is ascribed to history, the deviations, the follies, the personal ambitions, the thousand fantastic accidents which compose it and of which those who have observed their own times know it to be made up, all that disappears, is overlooked, and is hardly judged worthy of being taken into account. The whole acquires, after the event, a semblance of reason which is deceptive. The fact becomes a view of the mind. One ceases to judge

except from a height. One insensibly puts oneself in the place of Providence. In every particular accident one finds inevitable concatenations, *necessities*, as they are called. But if one afterwards passes from study to practice, one is apt to shut one's eyes to the fact that in the present one has incessantly to reckon with passions and follies, with human inconsequence. In this present one expects, and that immediately, net products such as one imagines to have resulted in the past. One puts the matter into the hands of experience. In this age of sophists in which we live, every school imperiously demands, in the name of the philosophy of history (for every school has its own philosophy of history), the innovation which in its eyes is no more than a rigorous and legitimate conclusion. It is interesting to see how, in the name of this supposed historical experience which is nothing more than logic, every one presumptuously arrogates to himself the present and claims the future as his own.

M. Guizot knows better than we these difficulties, and he would combat them, if need were, with his superiority. But he has not for his own part been exempt from them, and he has lent authority, by his predominating influence, to these general ways of looking at things. His philosophy of history, though more specious and more on the ordinary level, is none the less much too logical to be true. I can see in it only an artificial and convenient method for settling the accounts of the past. One conceals all the forces which have not produced their effect and which might however have produced it. One draws up in the best order, under complex names, all those forces which can be recovered and gathered together. All lost causes, which were not adequately represented or which were definitively vanquished, are declared impossible, born decrepit, and from all time doomed to defeat. And often how little was wanting to make them triumphant! The facts of high antiquity are those which lend themselves best to this kind of systematic history. They are dead, they reach us scattered and piece-meal; they let themselves be ordered about and disciplined at will, when a capable hand is extended to erect and reconstruct them. But modern history offers more resistance. M. Guizot knows it well. In his *History of Civilization in*

England it is only when he comes to the sixteenth century that he sets before himself the disadvantages of hasty generalizations: it is then too that these objections start up of themselves on all hands, and we re-enter the stormy and changeable atmosphere of modern and present times. The generalization which seems profound when applied to the already distant ages, would seem frivolous and bold on this side of them. Let us come to an understanding: I admire that far-reaching and ingenious force of intellect which remakes, which restores all in the past that is capable of being remade, which gives a meaning, if not a true meaning, at least a plausible and probable meaning to it, which subdues the want of order in history, and which provides the study of it with useful points of support and directions. But what I emphasize as a danger is a habit of arguing from a past thus remade and reconstructed, from an artificially simplified past, to an unstable, variable, changing present. For my own part, when I have read some of these lofty lessons on the *History of Civilization* which are so clear and positive, I quickly open again a volume of Retz' *Memoirs*, to re-enter the real world of intrigues and human masquerade.

Here we touch upon one of the essential reasons why the historian, even the great historian, is not necessarily a great politician nor a statesman. Those are talents which approximate and resemble each other, and which one is tempted to confound, but which differ by reason of inward conditions. The historian's duty is to recount and describe the malady when the patient is dead. The statesman takes upon himself to treat the still living patient. The historian operates on accomplished facts and simple (at least relatively simple) results: the politician is in presence of a certain quantity of results, more than one of which has a chance of springing to light at any moment.

Recent facts have brought this last truth into prominence. I here appeal to the good sense of all the world and say: In politics there are several different ways in which a thing which is about to take place may turn. When the thing is done one only sees the event. What passed before our eyes in February is a great example. The affair might have turned in many different ways. Fifty years hence it will be maintained perhaps (according to the method of the doctrinaires) that it was a necessity.

In a word, there are many possible defiles in the march of human affairs. It is all very well on the part of the absolute philosopher to say: 'In history I like the high roads, I only believe in the high-roads'. Good sense replies: 'These high roads are generally made by the historian. The high road is made by widening the defile through which one has passed, and at the expense of the other defiles which one might have passed through'.

A positive mind, who knew how to combine the practical object and the abstract view, M. Guizot took care not to become too long entangled in these historic formulas in which a German professor would have stuck for ever. He, M. Guizot, stated them, but did not confine himself within them. In 1826, he was able to choose as matter for history a subject, which was then most appropriate from its analogies with our own political situation, and which besides was adapted to his talent by every kind of fitness: he undertook the *History of the Revolution in England.* Two volumes only of this History have appeared so far, and the narrative only extends to the death of Charles I. After a long interruption M. Guizot returns to it to-day, and he signalizes this return by the remarkable *Discourse* which we may now read. In spite of interruptions and intervals, the beginning of 1826 and the resumption of 1850 have this in common, that the former was intended to be a lesson for that time, and the resumed work is again intended as a lesson to the present time. In 1826 the lesson was addressed to the Royalty which wished to be absolute, and to the *ultra* Royalists. In 1850 it is addressed to the democracy. But why always a lesson? Is not history thus presented in danger of being diverted from its purpose, and of being adjusted a little?

Be that as it may, the two published volumes of this *History of the English Revolution* have a serious interest and offer a virile and grave narrative, a series of facts of a firm and dense texture, with great and elevated parts. The scenes of the death of Strafford and the trial of Charles I are treated simply and with great dramatic effect. That which was more difficult, and which M. Guizot excels in setting forth, is the debates, the discussions, the pullings and tuggings of parties, the parliamentary side of history, the situation of ideas in

the different groups at a given moment: he understands in a masterly way this marshalling of ideas. Sprung from a Calvinist race, he has preserved a certain austere turn which belonged to it, an affinity for comprehending and reproducing those tenacious natures, those energetic and gloomy inspirations. The habits of race and early education stamp themselves on one's talent and reappear in one's speech, even when they have disappeared from the habits of life: one retains the fibre and the tone of them. Men, characters are expressed, when they are met with, with vigorous touches; but the whole lacks a certain brilliance, or rather a certain inner and continuous animation. The characters have no individual life; the historian takes them, seizes them, makes their profile stand out in copper. His drawing betrays a hand of great firmness, great confidence. He knows what he wants to say, and what he is aiming at: he never hesitates. The ridiculous and ironical side of things, the sceptical side which other historians have overdone, has no place with him. He makes us very sensible of a sort of subsistent moral gravity in the same men in the midst of schemings and plottings; but he does not sufficiently bring out the contradiction. He has, as he proceeds, many a State maxim, but none of those moral reflexions which light up and rejoice, which relax, which restore humanity to its place, such as Voltaire is continually giving vent to. His style is sad and never laughs. I gave myself the pleasure of reading at the same time the corresponding pages of Hume: one would not believe that they were dealing with the same history, so different is the tone! What I remark especially is that I find it possible, when reading Hume, to check him, to contradict him sometimes: he procures me the means of doing so by the very details he gives, by the balance he strikes. In reading M. Guizot that is almost impossible, the texture is so close and the whole so linked together. He holds you and leads you to the end, forcibly combining fact, reflexion, and aim.

In what degree, even after these two volumes, and considering him as a whole, is M. Guizot a painter in history? To what extent and in what measure is he strictly speaking a narrator? These would be very interesting questions to discuss from a literary point of view,

without complaisance, without prejudice: and even in what we should deny M. Guizot, there would enter quite a recognition and a definition of a unique originality of manner quite his own. Even when he narrates, as in the *Life of Washington*, he gives one the idea of a certain abstract beauty, not an external beauty made to please the eye. His expression is forcible, ingenious; it is not naturally pictorial. He sometimes uses the burin, never the brush. His style, in the fine parts, has reflexes of copper and we may say of steel, but reflexes under a grey sky, never in the sunlight. Somebody said of Joinville, that naïve chronicler, that his style *savours of childhood*, and that 'the things of the world are born for him only on the day he first sees them'. It is quite the contrary with M. Guizot, who is at the other extremity of the historical chain. His thought, his narrative even, generally invest themselves in something abstract, something semi-philosophical. To all he touches he imparts the colouring of a previous thought. Nothing astonishes him, he explains whatever presents itself, he gives the why and the wherefore. A person who knew him well said of him: 'What he hears this morning he gives you the impression of having known from all eternity'. Indeed, an idea, entering this lofty mind, leaves its freshness behind it; it is at once withered and becomes old. It contracts premeditation, firmness, weight, character, and sometimes a gloomy brilliancy.

Having said all this, it is just to acknowledge that, especially in the second volume of the *History of the Revolution in England*, there are some irreproachable parts of a continuous narrative. It is when M. Guizot indulges himself in his favourite manner, as in the recent *Discourse*, that everything naturally turns to consideration. The very description of the fact is already a result.

But one could not form a good judgment of the writer in M. Guizot, if one did not speak of the orator. The one is closely related to the other, and has reacted on the other. In most cases it is the writer (as Cicero has remarked) who contributes to form the orator. In M. Guizot it is rather the speaker who has helped to perfect the writer, and somebody said rightly that he put the finishing touch to his style on the marble of the speaker's

tribune. At his first commencement M. Guizot did not always write well, he wrote at least very unequally. As soon, however, as his passion was brought into play, in his polemical articles, in his pamphlets, he had his sharp and steeled points. It has long been said that M. Guizot did not write well. One must think twice before denying him any quality; for with that tenacious and ardent will which is in him, he may very soon conquer that quality that one denies him, and say: There it is! As a professor M. Guizot spoke well, but not extraordinarily well; he had clearness, a perfect lucidity of exposition, but repetitions of abstract terms, very little elegance, little warmth. We always have the warmth of our ambitions. M. Guizot's ambition could feel at ease and at home only on the parliamentary stage, in the heart of political struggles: there he became entirely himself and grew great. He still needed some apprenticeship; but dating from 1837 he displayed his full talent. He had not only what I call the heat of his ambition, at times he had the fire of it in his speech. However this fire still showed rather in his glance, his gesture, his action. His speech, taken by itself, rather has power and nerve. I stop in my praises of him. One cannot here, if one has the feeling of a citizen, confine oneself to the mere literary point of view; for, is it then possible to forget it? that speech has translated itself into acts, it has had effects that are too real. That marvellous power of authority and serenity (to choose a word he is fond of), that sovereign art of imparting to things an apparent simplicity, a deceptive evidence, which was only in the idea, was one of the principal causes of the illusion which ruined the last administration. Eloquence in that degree is a great power; but is it not also one of those *deceptive powers* that Pascal spoke of? In the last years of the preceding administration there existed two very distinct atmospheres, that inside the Chamber and that without. When M. Guizot's eloquence reigned inside the house, when it had filled and remade that artificial atmosphere, one thought one had conjured down the storms. But the outside atmosphere was all the more charged with them, and out of equilibrium with the inner air. Hence the final explosion.

M. Guizot's style has come out of these trials of the speaker's tribune firmer and better tempered than before;

his thought has come forth unmodified. The present *Discourse* which he has just published is a proof of it. This *Discourse* is written with a master hand, but also in the tone of a master. He views the Revolution in England in its whole course, from the origin of the troubles under Charles I until after William III, and up to the entire consolidation of the Settlement of 1688. Looking at the direct intention which stands out from the picture, and which explicitly translates itself in the conclusions, it is clear that in the eyes of the eminent historian, all the lessons which this Revolution in England, already so fertile in real and false analogies, furnishes us with, are not exhausted. This prepossession for the English administration and for the application of the English remedy to our malady, though a more specious error and touching us more nearly, seems to me none the less a grave error, which has already been baneful enough to us. For example, much has been said, under the preceding constitutional government, of the *lawful country*: 'The *lawful country* is for us, we have the *lawful country*'. What has that led to? In England, such a word is significant; for there they have, before all, respect for the law. In France, one must appeal to other instincts, one must lay hold of other threads in order even to hold the lawful country. This Gallic people is quick, tumultuous, inflammable. Is it necessary to remind the eminent historian, who has known and handled the two countries, of those essential differences of genius and character? And it is with character rather than with ideas that a nation governs itself. A foreigner, a man of wit, is accustomed to divide human nature into two parts, *human nature in general* and the *French nature*, meaning that the latter sums up and combines in itself to such an extent the inconstancies, the contradictions, the ficklenesses of the other that it forms a distinct variety and almost a species. M. de la Rochefoucauld, who had seen the Fronde and all its versatilities, said one day to Cardinal Mazarin: 'Everything may happen in France!' It was the same moralist, contemporary with Cromwell, who said this other word that is so true: 'Fortune and humour govern the world'. Understand by humour the temperament and character of men, the obstinacy of princes, the complaisance and presumption of ministers, the irritation and

spite of party chiefs, the turbulent disposition of the populace, and say, you who have been through public affairs and who no longer speak from the front of the stage, if that is not in great part the truth.

Only with an extreme discretion, then, should one, it seems to me, propose general remedies made up of ideas only. M. Guizot, after taking in with his superior sight the Revolution in England and that in America, recognizes in those countries three great men, Cromwell, William III, and Washington, who remain in history the chiefs and representatives of those sovereign crises which have made the destiny of two powerful nations. He characterizes them one after the other in broad outlines. All three succeeded, the two latter more completely. Cromwell less so: he only succeeded in holding his own and founded nothing. M. Guizot attributes this difference to the fact that William III and Washington 'even in the midst of a revolution never accepted nor practised revolutionary policies'. He thinks it was the misfortune of Cromwell to have been obliged at first, by the necessity of his position, to embrace and practise that policy whose alloy rendered his power always precarious. M. Guizot concludes from this that under all forms of government, 'whether it be a monarchy or a republic, an aristocratic or a democratic society, the same light shines out of the facts; the ultimate success is only obtained, he says, in the name of the same principles and by the same means. The revolutionary spirit is fatal to the greatness it raises as to that it overthrows'.

M. Guizot will permit me here to consider that this conclusion, whilst I hold it true in its generality, is perfectly vague and sterile. To say in general to governments that they must in no degree be revolutionary, is by no means to point out to them ways and means, the contrivances necessary to preserve; for it is in the detail of each situation that the difficulty lies and that there is room for skill. If you say to an army general: 'Adopt only the defensive method, never the offensive', will he be much more likely to win a battle? As if there were not moments, besides, when to defend Rome it is necessary to attack Carthage!

In what regards men in particular, M. Guizot's conclusion appears to me much too absolute. Cromwell,

you say, was only partially successful because he was revolutionary. I will add that Robespierre failed since then from the same cause and for other reasons besides. But Augustus succeeded in the two characters. He was by turns Octavius and Augustus; he proscribed and he founded. And as this same Augustus tells us so eloquently by the mouth of the great Corneille:

> Mais l'exemple souvent n'est qu'un miroir trompeur;
> Et l'ordre du Destin, qui gêne nos pensées,
> N'est pas toujours écrit dans les choses passées.
> Quelquefois l'un se brise où l'autre s'est sauvé,
> Et par où l'un périt un autre est conservé.

That is the only practical philosophy of history: nothing absolute, an experience always called in question, and the unexpected hiding in similarities.

Bossuet has the habit, in his views, of introducing Providence, or rather he does not introduce it: it reigns with him in a continuous and sovereign fashion. I admire that religious inspiration in the great bishop; but, in practice, it led him to divine right and sacred politics. In the modern historians, who have risen to general and well-argued considerations, Providence only intervenes incidentally, and, if we may say so, in the great moments. The more discreet and rare the intervention is, under their pen, the more does it attest a real reverence. For, in many cases, when one is lavish with it, it may appear much rather an instrument of speech, an oratorical and social effect, than an inward and quite sincere exaltation. That is not the case with M. Guizot. From his origins he has preserved the religious feeling, the turn of mind and the habitual movement towards Providence. For a man, however, who has the reverence and the religion of it to that degree, he makes too frequent use, it seems to me too familiar use, of that mysterious intervention:

'The fall of Clarendon, he says, has been attributed to the defects of his character, and to a few errors or checks in his statesmanship, at home or abroad. *That is to disregard the greatness of the causes which decide the lot of eminent men. Providence, who lays upon them so rude a task, does not treat them so rigorously as to overlook a few weaknesses, as to overthrow them inconsiderately* for a few faults or a few particular defeats. Other great ministers, Richelieu, Mazarin, Walpole, have had their failings and have committed faults, and suffered checks

as serious as those of Clarendon. But they understood their time; the views and efforts of their policy were in harmony with its needs, with the general state and movement of minds. Clarendon mistook his epoch; he failed to recognize the meaning of the great events which he had witnessed. . . .'

So you appear to think that Providence is more considerate when she has to do with those *eminent men* who are called Mazarin or Walpole, than when she has to do with mere honest private people! You leave to the latter the little causes and the paltry accidents which decide their destiny. As to the others, the veritable statesmen, the men of high-flying ambitions, you think that they never succumb except from motives worthy of them, worthy of the painful sacrifice they lay upon themselves when they govern us. In a word, you think that Providence thinks twice before bringing them to fall. For my part, I think that as soon as she thinks of it, one thought and one measure suffices for all. But this measure is deeply hid from us.

I might pick out besides a few other assertions equally absolute, equally gratuitous, which make me doubtful of the intrinsic reasonableness of this imposing philosophy. But if we examine the *Discourse* in respect of the subject itself, that is to say the Revolution in England, there is much to praise. When I contest the possibility of man's attaining to the thousand distant and various causes, I am far from denying that order of considerations and conjectures by which, in a definite frame, one tries to connect the effects with the causes. That is the noble science of Machiavelli and Montesquieu, when they, each of them, deal with the Romans. The Revolution in England, considered in its proper elements and its limits, that Revolution which presents itself as confined, so to say, within the tiltyard, lends itself better than any other perhaps to such a study, and M. Guizot is better qualified than anybody to deal with it pertinently, without mixing up with it any of those disputed conclusions which everybody may draw for himself. We might draw attention, in his *Discourse*, to portraits drawn with vigour and relief, notably those of Monk and Cromwell. The talent, in short, which shows us all that, is—need it be said?—a superior one. But, even whilst considering only the judgments relating to the English Revolution, the linking

of causes and effects will appear too far-fetched. At every decisive crisis the author is not content with explaining it, he declares that it could not have happened otherwise. It is habitual with him to say: 'It was too soon . . . it was too late . . . God was only beginning to exercise his justice and give his lessons (page 31)'. What can you know about it?

Let us remain men in history. Montaigne, who loved reading history above anything, has given us the reasons of his predilection, and they are ours. He loved, he tells us, only the quite simple and naïve historians, who recount the facts without picking and choosing, *in good faith*; or, among the more learned and more exalted historians, he loved only the excellent ones, those who know how to choose and say what is worth knowing. 'But those *betwixt and between* spoil everything for us; they want to chew our morsels for us: they presume to judge, and consequently to incline history to their fancy; for as soon as the judgment leans to one side, one cannot keep from turning and twisting the narration to that bias'. That is the rock of danger, and talent, even of the first order, is no guarantee against it. A consummate experience should at least, I think, be a guarantee against it. Those superior men who have passed through public affairs, and who have left them, still have a great part to play, but on condition that this part be quite different from the first, and even that it be no longer a part. Initiated as they have been into the secret of things, into the vanity of good counsels, into the illusion of the best minds, into human corruption, let them sometimes tell us something about them; let them not disdain to permit us to touch with a finger the little springs which have often been in motion in the great moments. Let them not always strain humanity. The lesson which comes out of history should not be direct and inflexible; it should not be fired off at us point-blank so to say, but should emanate gently and insinuate. It should have a relish, as we said recently when speaking of Commynes; it is a quite moral lesson. Do not fear to show these trifles even in your great pictures; elevation will afterwards reappear. The nothingness of man, the littleness of his loftiest reason, the inanity of what once seemed wise, all the labour, study, talent, merit, meditation necessary to compose even an

error, all that brings us back also to a more serious thought, to the thought of a supreme power ; but then, instead of speaking in the name of this power which baffles us, one bows one's head, and history yields all its fruit.

THE POET FIRDOUSI [1]

Monday, February 11, 1850.

Reassure yourself, there is nothing seditious in this title of *Book of the Kings*. We are speaking of an immense poem composed, more than eight hundred years ago, by a great poet, the Homer of his country, whose name is doubtless new to many of my readers. I will confess that it is not very long since I myself have made a slight acquaintance with him. This poet no more invented the subjects he celebrates than did Homer; he drew them from tradition, from popular legends and ballads, and made of them a comprehensive poem which, for those distant times, in some sort takes the place of history. This poem, to which he applied his genius (and this genius is manifest), appeared worthy, a few years ago, of being published with luxury at Paris, in the Oriental Collection of unedited manuscripts, at the expense of the Government. Three volumes (text and translation) have already appeared, and the learned translator, M. Mohl, is in a position to give us the continuation and the end. But, since February, 1848, the changes which the management of the erstwhile Royal Printing-house has undergone have reacted upon the destinies of the magnificent book, which is arrested without cause. It is time that the printing of the book were resumed and continued. It is a great sign that a civilization is refloated when no abatement makes itself felt in these higher studies, which are the luxury and the crown, we may say, of intelligence.

I would like, in the way of variety, to give a slight sketch both of the poet and his work. It is a good thing to travel sometimes; it widens one's ideas and lessens

1 *The Book of the Kings*. By the Persian poet Firdousi, published and translated by M. Jules Mohl (3 vols., folio).

one's conceit. We get a juster measure of what we call fame, and of what that grand word comes to. On the days when we are too infatuated with ourselves and our importance, I know of nothing more tranquillizing than to read a book of travels in Persia or China. There live millions of people who have never heard speak of us, who will never hear speak of us, and who can do without you. 'How many kingdoms there are which know nothing about us!' said Pascal. This Firdousi or Ferdousi, for example, this great poet who, at first sight, astonishes us, and whose very name we hardly know how to pronounce, is popular in his own country. If ever you go to Persia, that country of an ancient civilization, which has suffered many conquests, many religious revolutions, but which has had, properly speaking, no Middle Age, and in which certain traditions have been preserved all along, take a man out of any class, and repeat to him a few lines of Ferdousi: the chances are, I am told, that he will recite the following lines himself; for the musicians and singers go about chanting whole episodes of the poem at feasts and gatherings. The temperament of this nation is wholly poetic. What has been said a little complacently of the Venetian gondoliers singing the octaves of Tasso could more truly be said of the lower classes in Persia reciting the lines of Ferdousi. In our own days Persian troops have been seen marching to battle against the Turcomans chanting passages from his epopee. Few poets could be named in our Western world who enjoy the like good fortune. And yet it appears singular to us that a man can be so celebrated anywhere and so unknown in our country, and we might be tempted to say to this foreign genius what the Parisians of Montesquieu's time said to Usbek and Rica in the *Lettres Persanes*: "Ah! ah! monsieur est Persan! c'est une chose bien extraordinaire. Comment peut-on être Persan?'

Ferdousi then was born in Persia about the year 940, and did not die till 1020, at the age of eighty years. That was the time when we in France were still quite in the iron age, in a state of barbarism, and when, after the agony of the last Carlovingians, a rude monarchy was shaping itself under Hugh Capet and King Robert. Persia, conquered by the Arabs, suddenly clothed itself in a new civilization, but did not entirely strip off the old one.

After the first times of the Mussulman conquest, it came about indeed that the chiefs and governors of the Eastern province, the vassals most distant from Bagdad, the seat of the Califate, aimed at emancipating themselves and, to increase their strength, they tried to support themselves on a popular basis, and particularly on the class of rural land-owners, who are in every country naturally attached to their old customs. Now, in order to conciliate this class, composed of the most ancient families of Persia, the princes of new formation could find no better means than to revive and favour the cultivation of the old historic and national traditions, the memories of former dynasties and heroes. Though Mussulmans by religion, they did not recoil from this awakening of an antique past in which the prevailing religion was that of Zoroaster. Their little Courts were filled with Persian poets who vied in taking up and rehandling those subjects of popular ballads. The Sultan Mahmoud, of Turkish race, who reigned in Cabul, and whose conquests extended as far as India, was one of the most eager to signalize himself on this road of literary renascence which helped on his political plans, or which might at least make his reign illustrious. However, about the time when this Turk, violent and ambitious by the way, was interesting himself so strongly in these matters of the intellect, a man, gifted by nature with genius, had felt himself urged by a powerful call to these lofty thoughts. In his native town of Thous, the boy Ferdousi, son of a gardener, seated on the edge of the irrigation canal which flowed before his father's house, had often thought to himself that it would be a fine thing to leave a memory of himself in this fleeting world. He saw that the world was enamoured of the histories of the ancient heroes. All the men of intellect and all the men of courage were taking an interest in them. It was the appointed work for a genius; it was the golden bough to be plucked at that season. Already a young man, gifted with a fluent tongue, great eloquence and a brilliant wit, had announced his design to put these histories into verse, and the hearts of all were rejoiced. But this poet, by name Dakiki, had not in him all the needful wisdom to accomplish grave thoughts; he fell into bad company, gave up to it his feeble and gentle soul, and was assassinated in a brawl. His design re-

mained unfulfilled, and Ferdousi took it up with ardour. He has himself told how, when he first took up the enterprise, whilst occupied in searching the already partly collected traditions, he was tormented by a jealous sadness, fearing that his life was too short for such a work and that his treasure might escape him. He had in his native town a friend who was his second self, and they were like two souls in one body. This friend sustained, encouraged him: 'It is a beautiful plan, he said, and thy foot will lead thee to fortune. Do not slumber! thou hast the gift of speech, thou hast youth, thou canst tell an heroic tale: recount again this royal book, and thereby seek glory with the great'. This friend abridged his researches, procured him a certain collection already made, and the poet, seeing that he was able to master the material, felt his sadness turned to joy. But the world was then filled with wars, and the time seemed unfavourable to the hope of being rewarded. Every poet, in every country, seeks his Augustus and his Maecenas; call this Maecenas by what name you please; Ferdousi sought his. He thought at first that he had found him in the governor of his province, Abou-Manzour, a young prince filled with generosity and clemency, who said to him: 'What must I do that thy soul may turn to this poem?' Ferdousi already hoped that his fruit was going to ripen sheltered from the storm; but the young governor perished by assassination, and the poet again found himself at the mercy of destiny. It was then that he heard speak of Sultan Mahmoud, who, in his Court at Ghaznin, was gathering around him a pleiad of poets, who set them to work in competition at the histories of the ancient kings, and desired a man capable of adorning and beautifying without altering them. What Mahmoud desired, Ferdousi was on the way to carry out. Ferdousi was no longer young, he was about fifty-seven years of age; for more than twenty years he had been at work on his poem. At the first news he had of Sultan Mahmoud's call he felt a thrill: 'My sleeping star, he said, awoke; a crowd of thoughts arose in my brain. I saw that the moment to speak was come, and that the old times would return'. So he wended his way to the court at Ghaznin, where he had still some difficulty in attracting the notice of the Sultan; he gained it at last and succeeded in charming

him. In a challenge he vanquished all the court poets, and the Sultan, in a moment of enthusiasm, gave him that surname of Ferdousi (for that was not his original name); *Ferdousi* means the man of *Paradise,* he who makes of the earth a Paradise by the magic of his word.

During the first years, the poet saw the realization of his dream. His life was like a continual intoxication of poetry. 'He had an apartment adjoining the palace, with a door of communication leading into the king's private garden. The walls of his apartment were covered with paintings representing arms of every kind, with horses, elephants, dromedaries and tigers, portraits of the kings and heroes of Iran whom he was commissioned to celebrate. Mahmoud provided that no person should interrupt him at his work, by forbidding his door to all the world, with the exception of a single friend and a slave charged with the domestic service. The Sultan professed a passionate admiration for him, and was pleased to say that he had often heard these same histories, but that Ferdousi's poetry made them as new, and that it inspired his hearers with eloquence, bravery and pity'. As soon as an episode was composed, the poet recited it to the king; he was seated before him on a cushion, and musicians and dancers behind him accompanied him in rhythm.

But the favour of princes is deceptive. Tasso, in the midst of the delights of Ferrara, could tell a tale of this: Ferdousi, at the court of Ghaznin, had the same experience. Mahmoud cooled by imperceptible degrees; his ministers became aware of it and carried out his orders more carelessly; they paid the poet ill, and so in the midst of gold he was in straits. The Court poets, Ferdousi's literary rivals and enemies, pretended that the success of his work came from the interest of the themes much more than from the talent of the author. Finally, he was one day accused of heresy, the most serious accusation in any country. After twelve years of residence at Ghaznin, and when his poem, consisting of nearly sixty thousand distichs (a hundred and twenty thousand lines), was finished, Ferdousi saw the dream of his fortune crumble to pieces. The final sum, which was to be paid to him in gold, was only paid in pieces of silver. This sum of gold he had so greatly desired, and which he did not wish to

disturb in advance, he intended to make a touching use of. In his native town he had often, as I have said, sat upon the bank of the canal which flowed before his father the gardener's house, and there he had nursed his first dreams. But this canal, swelled by the waters, often overflowed and caused ruin and disaster. Ferdousi had from the beginning intended to build, with the sum of money that he should receive, a dam to contain the waters, and so to be the benefactor of his country-side. This noble poet had a royal soul. He was in the bath when the derisory sum was brought to him in pieces of silver; he made three portions of it: a third part he gave to the bath attendant, a third to the friend who had brought it, and, with the other third he paid for a single glass of *fouka* (a kind of beer) which he ordered. He kept nothing for himself. Having done this, he resolved to quit the Sultan's court without delay, and departed in secret, with a staff in his hand, in the habit of a dervish. He was about seventy years of age. Before starting, he left in the hands of a friend a sealed paper, with the request that it should be handed to the Sultan twenty days after his departure. When the Sultan opened this paper addressed to him, he found it to be a scathing satire. It was the poet's revenge, the Parthian arrow which he shot in his flight, and this revenge still exists. We read in it:

'O King, I have addressed to thee a homage which shall be the memory which thou wilt leave to the world. The edifices one builds fall to ruin from the effect of rain and the sun's heat; but I, in my poem, have raised an immense edifice that neither rain nor wind can harm'.

Ferdousi had no need to read Horace or Ovid to say the same things as they, with the lofty consciousness of his power, and with a more poignant feeling. He continues to do himself justice, and to exercise it upon that ungrateful king:

'Centuries, he said, will pass over this book, and whoever has intelligence will read it. I have lived thirty-five years in poverty, in misery and hardships, and yet thou hadst made me hope for a different reward, and I expected something different from the master of the world! . . . But the son of a slave cannot be worth much, even though his father became a king. . . . If thou shouldst plant in the garden of Paradise a tree

whose fruit is bitter, if thou shouldst water its roots with pure honey drawn from the stream of Paradise, in the end it will show its nature and bear a bitter fruit'.

It was not, by the way, from a selfish desire to avenge himself that he wrote this satire, but with a loftier thought:

'This is why I write these powerful lines: in order that the king may take a counsel, that he may know henceforth the power of speech, that he may reflect on the advice of an old man, that he may not afflict any other poets, and that he may look after his honour; for an injured poet composes a satire, and it will remain till the day of Resurrection'.

This proud prediction is true of Ferdousi as of Dante. After this bold stroke, Ferdousi wandered about for years, seeking a court where the Sultan's anger could not reach him. At length, thinking that the affair had calmed down and been forgotten, he had returned to his native town, when one day, passing through the bazaar, he heard a boy recite a cutting verse of that same satire, which had circulated about the world. The old man had a sudden seizure and swooned; he was carried to his house, where he died at the age of eighty years. They buried him in a garden. At first the chief priest refused to read the customary prayers over his grave, alleging that old suspicion of heresy, and from fear no doubt of displeasing the Sultan. But soon bethinking himself, and warned by the public voice, he pretended to have seen Ferdousi in a vision in heaven, clothed in a green robe and wearing on his head a crown of emeralds, and he thought himself authorized in paying him the tribute which is accorded to the faithful. Meanwhile Sultan Mahmoud had seen his injustice, and he sent to the poet the hundred thousand pieces of gold which he owed him, with a robe of honour and words of excuse. But, as in Tasso's case, this tardy homage came too late for Ferdousi and found only a grave. At the very moment when the gold-laden camels arrived at one of the gates of Thous, the funeral procession was issuing by another. They brought the Sultan's presents to the house of Ferdousi's daughter, who, with a heart worthy of her father, refused them, saying: 'I have that which suffices for my needs, and I desire not this wealth'. But the poet had a sister, who remembered the wish he

had cherished from his childhood of some day building a stone dam for the river of Thous, in order to leave in a public benefit the memory of his life. She accepted the sum; the long-wished-for dam was constructed, but when the poet was no more: four centuries afterwards, the remains of it were still to be seen. Such is briefly the life of Ferdousi, as I have gathered it from M. Mohl's work.

My readers will guess already that the poem which came from such a hand and was cherished in such a heart cannot be a vulgar work. It would require much space to give a somewhat general idea of it. The book consists of a series of rather loosely connected episodes. The poet relates the whole history of the early kings of Persia, of the founders of dynasties, as transmitted and transformed in the memory, full of imagination and fairy-lore, of these Eastern peoples. Fables abound, hiding symbols which are not easy to see through. True epic poetry, in order to be alive, must rest upon popular roots and draw from them its sap, otherwise it will produce only study-works, beautiful perhaps, but always rather cold. Virgil only succeeded in producing an epopee of this kind: Homer offers us the finished model of the former kind. If we read it with conviction, we may grasp both the heart of the things which were to be transmitted, and the individual genius which took them in hand and heightened them. But, passing over into the Eastern world where all is strange, we find it difficult to lend credence to these marvellous, gigantic traditions, which no longer concern us in any degree, and we are at a loss, through these floods of new colour, to say how much of them is due to the talent of the poet. However, thanks to the faithful and conscientious method of translation adopted by M. Mohl, we can to a certain extent form an idea of Ferdousi's personal genius. This genius, as it expresses itself in the ordinary parts and in what we may call the recitative of the poem, is quite moral and serious. On seeing so many dynasties and so many centuries following each other which, at a distance, appear to be gathered into one day, the poet conceived a deep sense of the instability of human things, of the flight of life and the brilliant years, of the vanity of everything, except a good name; for he believes in poetry and fame. Beyond that, he finds a satisfaction in that tranquil, universal detachment, that kind of transcendent

epicureanism, which we find exhaling from Solomon's books of *Wisdom*. This eternal theme is here rejuvenated by a charming imagination. In Ferdousi it is combined with a particular softness, a disposition to clemency and compassion, which suggests the neighbourhood of India. For example, one of the best kings he introduces to us in the early dynasties, Feridoun, has three sons. These three brothers, the youngest of whom is not of the same mother as the other two, are quite different in character. The two eldest, devoured by ambition, jealous of the preference shown by their father to the youngest, decide to put him out of the way. It is the conspiracy of the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph. The young man, the virtuous Iredji, is warned by his father himself of the evil design of his elder brothers, but he will use no other arms with them than persuasion, and, looking tenderly upon his old father, he utters these fine words :

'O king ! think of the instability of life which must pass over us like the wind. Why should a man of sense grieve ? Time will make the pink cheek to wither and dim the eye of the shining soul. At the beginning life is a treasure, at the end it is pain, and then we must quit this transitory dwelling. Since the earth will be our bed and our pillow a brick, why plant a tree to-day whose roots would be nourished with blood, whose fruit would be vengeance ? The crown, the throne and the diadem have no value for me ; I will go to meet my brothers without an army, and I will say to them : O my illustrious brothers, who are dear to me as my body and my soul, do not hate me, do not meditate vengeance against me ! hatred is not fitting to believers '.

Iredji carries out this project ; he goes to meet his brothers with a peaceful spirit, and in the moment when one of them, in a fit of brutal fury, strikes him and is about to kill him, he says :

'Hast thou no fear of God, no pity for thy father ? Is this thy will ? Do not kill me, for, in the end, God will deliver thee up to torture as the price of my blood. Do not become a murderer, for, from this day thou shalt see no trace of me. Dost thou approve then and canst thou reconcile these two things, that thou hast received life and that thou takest it from another ? Do not hurt an ant which drags a grain of corn, for it has a life, and sweet life is a blessing. . . .'

It is this spirit of wisdom, of elevation, of justice and

gentleness which circulates throughout the immense poem of Ferdousi, and that we breathe in the intervals where the light penetrates. The poet was right when, at the beginning of the book, comparing it with a tall cypress, he said: 'He who stands under a mighty tree, shall be protected from injury by its shade'. This sense of deep morality is enlivened, as we proceed, by light and brilliant passages, as befits a poet reared in the land of the peach and the rose.

The most celebrated episode of the poem, which is of a nature to interest us still, has for its theme the meeting of the hero Roustem and his son Sohrab. It is a beautiful and pathetic story which has travelled the world over, which has reblossomed in many a ballad in every country, and which many poets have rehandled and reinvented in their own way, even to Ossian in his poem of *Carthon* and Voltaire in his *Henriade.* Voltaire had certainly not read Ferdousi, but he had the same idea, that of a father in mortal combat with his son, and killing him before he recognized him. Voltaire's thought is quite philosophical and humane ; his intention is to inspire horror of civil wars. Ferdousi, in his narrative drawn from tradition, is far from having had such a positive intention ; but we do not scruple to say that after reading this dramatic and touching episode, this adventure all full of colours in the first place and of perfumes, and finally of tears, if we afterwards open the eighth canto of the *Henriade,* we are conscious of all the height that epic poetry has fallen from among modern nations, and we experience the same impression as if we passed from the river Ganges to a fountain in the gardens of Versailles.

I beg leave to give in a few words an idea of this episode as it appears in Ferdousi. Roustem may well enough represent the Hercules or the Roland of Eastern traditions: he is not exactly a king, he is more than a king, and he too might say in his pride:

J'ai fait des souverains, et n'ai point voulu l'être.

Roustem belongs to that heroic age where physical strength is still considered as the first of virtues. One day he went out alone to chase the wild ass, in the direction of the country of the Turks, mounted on his good steed Raksch, as swift as fire. After killing a goodly number of wild

animals, overwhelmed with fatigue, he went to sleep, leaving Raksch to graze at his own will in the plain. A party of Turks coming that way stole the horse, not without a fine resistance on the part of the animal, and the killing of several of its ravishers. When Roustem awoke and saw the plight he was in, he was a little ashamed of his misadventure. He made his way slowly to the neighbouring city, called Semengan. His renown was so great that the king of the town, though a subject of the Turks, hearing of his approach, went to meet him, promised to send in search of Raksch, and offered him splendid hospitality. Roustem sat down to a banquet and got drunk, which was no disgrace. The night was almost over, when the door of the chamber in which he slept opened softly, and he saw approaching a marvellous beauty, guided by a slave girl. 'What is thy name? said the hero in great astonishment. What dost thou seek in the dark night? What is thy desire?' The veiled woman was no other than the beautiful Tehmimeh, the only daughter of the king of Semengan, and she ingenuously confessed her desire to the hero. She had heard tell many a fabulous tale of him, as Medea had heard tell of Jason, as Ariadne of Theseus, as Desdemona of Othello. She repeats to him a few of these stories which have led her reason astray. 'Such are the tales I have been told, she tells him, and I have often bitten my lip on thy account'. There is a fine saying of the Sage: 'Speak not of men before women, for the heart of woman is the dwelling-place of the devil, and this talk makes them cunning'. In short, the fair Tehmimeh offers herself to the hero, without too much cunning, however, and with perfect candour, desiring nothing so much as to have a son by a man like Roustem. She does not forget to add in the end, as a determining reason, that she will pledge herself to restore to him his good steed Raksch. Roustem, hearing these promises, and especially that concerning his good steed, finds no difficulty in complying. But, not to violate hospitality, he sends a grave man to ask the daughter of her father. The father is far from refusing; he gives his daughter according to the rites of the country, which appear to have been rather easy, and the fair Tehmimeh is at the summit of her happiness. At the first ray of dawn, Roustem took an onyx that he wore on his arm,

and which was famed in the whole world; he gave it to Tehmimeh with the words: 'Keep this jewel, and if Heaven wills that thou give birth to a daughter, take this onyx and fasten it to the locks of her hair under a good star and under happy auspices; but if the stars grant thee a son, attach it to his arm, as his father has worn it. . . .'

Roustem departs in the morning, mounted on his steed Raksch; he returns to Iran, and for years he has only vague news of the beautiful Tehmimeh and the son who was born to him; for it was a son and not a daughter. This son is handsome and of a shining countenance; he is called Sohrab. 'When he was a month old, he was like a boy of a year; when he was three, he exercised himself in the play of arms, and at five he had the heart of a lion. When he reached the age of ten years, no man in the country dared to wrestle with him'. He was distinguishable at first sight from all the Turks around; it became evident that he was born of another race. The boy, conscious of his strength, went proudly to ask of his mother the name of his father, and when he knew it, he had no rest until he had assembled an army to go and fight against the Iranians and by his exploits and bravery to win the recognition of the glorious Roustem.

Sohrab chose a horse strong enough to bear him, a horse strong as an elephant; he assembles an army and sets out, not to fight against his father, but to combat and dethrone the sovereign of whom Roustem is a vassal, and to put the valiant race of Roustem in the place of that already sluggard king. Here the action begins to be involved with an art and a skill which belong to the poet. The fatal solution is both foreseen and retarded by means of gradations which render it more dramatic. Roustem, summoned in all haste by the terrified king, shows no eagerness to answer the summons. Hearing of an army of Turks commanded by so valiant and heroic a youth, the idea at once occurs to him that it might be his son; but no: that scion of his race is too young, he thinks, 'and his lips still smell of milk'. Roustem arrives, however; but, when the king gives him a bad reception, he exhibits the wrath of Achilles, and is quite prepared to return to his tent. He only gives way when it is represented to him that his abstaining from the encounter would imply fear of the young hero. Meanwhile the two

armies are opposed to each other. Roustem, disguised as a Turk, gains entry into a castle held by the enemy, to find out everything himself. He sees his son seated at a banquet: he admires him, he compares his strength and beauty with that of his own race; at one moment one expects the blood within him to speak and to exclaim: *It is he!* As for the young Sohrab, next morning, in presence of that army whose camp is spread before him, he is eager to know if his noble father is there. From an elevated position he gets a prisoner to point out to him all the illustrious chiefs whose standards he sees unfurled. The prisoner enumerates them with complacency and names them all, all with one exception; and that is precisely the one who interests him most. The prisoner pretends to believe that Roustem has not come, for he is afraid lest this proud youth, conscious of his indomitable strength, wishes to signalize himself by attacking by preference that illustrious chief, and to cause a great calamity. Sohrab is persistent and expresses astonishment that of all the chiefs, the valiant Roustem, the foremost of all, should this time have failed to answer the call to arms; he plies the prisoner with questions, but the latter is cunning and persists in hiding the truth: 'No doubt, he replies, the hero has gone to Zaboulistan, for this is the time of feasts in the gardens of roses'. Sohrab, his blood boiling within him, replies: 'Speak not thus, for the face of Roustem is ever turned to battles'. But Sohrab tries in vain to force the secret, fatality is triumphant: 'How canst thou expect to govern this world which God rules? exclaims the poet. The Creator has determined everything in advance. Fate has written otherwise than thou wouldst have wished, and as it leads, thou must follow'. Sohrab enters the battle; everything gives way before him. Our old chivalric romances never resounded with the like sword blows. The most valiant chiefs withdraw. Roustem is called; he comes, and finds himself alone in presence of his son, and the duel is about to begin. Suddenly the old chief is seized with pity at the sight of this young warrior, so proud and so handsome:

'O tender youth! he says, the earth is dry and cold, the air is soft and warm. I am old; I have seen many a battlefield, I have destroyed many an army, and I have never been vanquished. . . . But I have pity on thee and would not

deprive thee of life. Remain not with the Turks; I know no man in Iran with shoulders and arms like thine'.

On hearing these words, which seem to come from a friendly soul, Sohrab's heart leaps forward, he has a sudden presentiment; he ingenuously asks the warrior if he is not the man he is in search of, if he is not the illustrious Roustem. But the old chief, not wishing to raise the pride of this stripling, answers with cunning that he is not Roustem, and the heart of Sohrab is immediately closed; the cloud which was about to open closes again, and destiny pursues its course.

The duel begins: it is not without strange vicissitudes and turns; it lasts two days. At the very first onset, the swords of the two combatants are shivered under their blows: 'What blows! you might think they were bringing the Resurrection!' The fight is continued with clubs; we are in the midst of the heroic age. On the first day the duel is quite undecided. After a desperate struggle the two chiefs separate, appointing to meet again on the morrow. Roustem shows astonishment at having met his match for the first time, almost his master, and at feeling his heart failing within him without knowing the reason. On the second day, at the moment of resuming the struggle, Sohrab has a movement of tenderness, and he makes a supreme effort before succumbing. Approaching the old chief, he addresses him with a smile on his lips, and as if they had spent the night amicably together:

'How hast thou slept, he asks him; how did'st thou rise this morning? Why hast thou prepared thy heart for the combat? Throw away this club and that sword of vengeance, throw away all this equipment for an impious combat. Let us sit down together on the ground, and soften these angry glances with wine. Let us make a treaty and call upon God, and repent in our heart of this hostility. Wait until another presents himself for the fight, and prepare with me a feast. My heart will communicate its love to thee, and I will make thine eyes to flow with tears of shame. Since thou art born of a noble race, tell me thy origin; hide not thy name from me, since thou art going to fight with me: are you not Roustem?'

Roustem, from a feeling of pride, and still suspecting a feint on the part of a young man so eager for fame, dis-

sembles for the last time, and from that moment fate has no truce. All these stratagems of Roustem (and I have not mentioned them all) turn against him; he ends by plunging a dagger into his son's breast, and does not recognize him until the last moment. The young man dies with resignation and meekness, thinking of his mother, of his friends, recommending that the army he has involved in a foolhardy undertaking be spared after his death:

'For many days I have given them fine words, I have held out to them the hope of obtaining everything; for how could I know, O illustrious hero, that I should perish by my father's hand? . . . I saw the marks that my mother had pointed out to me, but I did not believe mine eyes. My fate was written over my head, and I was destined to die by the hand of my father. I came like the thunderbolt, I depart like the wind; perhaps I shall see thee again happy in heaven'!

Thus spoke in his death agony this other Hippolytus, sacrificed here by the hand of Theseus.

The moral which the poet draws from this tearful story is quite antique, quite Oriental. In spite of the anger which the narrative involuntarily raises against Roustem, the poet accuses no one:

'The breath of death, he says, is like a consuming fire: it spares neither youth nor old age. Why then should the young rejoice, since old age is not the only cause of death? We must depart, and without tarrying, when death spurs the steed of destiny'!

For my part, the moral I will draw here will be a modern one, quite narrow and quite positive: it is that the publishing of this great book which contains this fine episode, and many more episodes, be started again as speedily as possible and finished, and that the contrarieties and annoyances which, eight hundred years ago, in the reign of Sultan Mahmoud, crossed the life and work of the poet Ferdousi, do not continue to pursue him to-day in the person of his learned editor and translator, who deserves both his and our gratitude.

GEORGE SAND[1]

Monday, February 18, 1850.

I HAD been for some time in arrears with Mme. Sand; I do not know why I had been remiss in reading her latest novels; not that I had not heard them very well spoken of, but I have known so long that Mme. Sand is an author of the greatest talent, that all her novels contain superior parts of description, situation and analysis, that in all, even in those which turn out least agreeably, there are original characters, charming paintings, introductions full of attraction; I have known all that so long, that I said to myself: It is always the same, and, in what she does to-day, she pursues her path of invention, of boldness and adventure. But, like all Paris, I went to see *Le Champi* at the Odéon; that sent me back to the novel with the same title and to that pastoral vein which the authoress discovered a little time ago; and then taking up her three or four novels last published, I was astonished to find a connected plan carried through, a quite new composition, a real perfection. I had unexpectedly entered an oasis of verdure, purity and freshness. I was delighted, and only then did I understand this sentence in a letter she wrote last year, from her province of Berry, to one of her lady friends who was teasing her about her politics: 'So you thought I was drinking blood out of the skulls of aristocrats; ah! no, I am studying Virgil and learning Latin'.

We will follow her example here, we will let politics alone with all its mischievous talk and foolish tales: they are legends which are not in our province. Oh! the dull

[1] *La Mare-au-Diable, La Petite Fadelle, François le Champi.* By George Sand (1846–1850).

legend about the provisional Government! Here we are in good earnest back in the country; George Sand the politician is a myth that never had any existence: Mme. Sand is for us more than ever the painter of the heart, the romance writer and the shepherdess.

Mme. Sand was better employed last year, in her native Berry, than in reading Virgil's *Georgics*; she was reproducing with her pen the Georgics of those central provinces of France, in a series of pictures of an incomparable richness and delicacy. She always loved to paint her native country-side; she described it in *Valentine*, in *André*, in a hundred places; but here she does not treat us to mere slices of landscape, at intervals and by snatches, as if to form a background to other scenes; she embraces country life itself; like our good ancestors, she says, she has *become intoxicated* with it, and she renders it with plenitude. The novel in which she began to make known her pastoral design, is *Jeanne*. Jeanne however, the shepherdess of Ep-Nell, is still a very poetic, a very romantic character; reminiscences of the Druids are introduced at the very beginning, to increase and idealize the reality. One soars in imagination between Velléda and Jeanne d'Arc; for take note that this Jeanne is no other than Jeanne d'Arc in repose, who only wanted the opportunity to make a stir. The placidity and wonderful simplicity of the beautiful shepherdess generally make her appear a mere simpleton. The *Hay-making* scenes assuredly present a picture full of charm and grace, but side by side with it we have that everlasting discussion between society and nature, between the leisured class and the lower or labouring classes, invariably to the advantage of the latter. *Jeanne* offers an interest, an elevated interest, but complicated with romance. In *La Mare-au-Diable* our true Georgics first begin; they are continued in *François le Champi*, in *La Petite Fadette*. There is the happy vein, there is the theme to which we shall here confine ourselves.

La Mare-au-Diable is simply a little master-work. The preface raised my fears a little. The authoress puts forward a philosophical idea, and I always tremble when I see a philosophical idea serving as a poster to a novel. The authoress tried to compose a counterpart to a melancholy drawing of Holbein, in which we see a wretched team of horses dragging a plough in a barren field; the old

peasant follows in rags; Death dominates the whole in form of a skeleton armed with a whip. 'We, exclaims the authoress, have no longer to do with death, but with life; we no longer believe either in the annihilation of the grave nor in salvation bought by a forced renunciation; we wish life to be good, because we wish it to be fertile. Lazarus must quit his dung-hill, in order that the poor may no more rejoice in the death of the rich. All must be happy. . . .' I cut short this series of *musts*, which would be more appropriate to one of those little philosophical sermons in which the writer tries to force upon others a faith he is not very sure of possessing himself, exciting himself by his own eloquence, making assertions in every tone, and becoming a prophet in order to try to be a believer. The true artist is worthy of not proceeding thus; and to all those who were early acquainted with and admired Mme. Sand, it has always been a subject of astonishment and an inexplicable riddle, to find her so credulous and, I ask her pardon, such a woman on one point: she readily believes in others' ideas. With a talent of the first order and not easily surpassed in our literature since its origin, she seems to fear lest this talent in its activity and power may lack subject and matter. To this end she receives and adopts the words and ideas of people who are, in truth, inferior to her in many respects. She thinks them superior because they come to definite conclusions, as if it were absolutely necessary for a great painter, a great poet to form conclusions. 'She is an echo that doubles the voice', somebody was able to say of her in this respect, and thinking of those by whom she thought to inspire herself. And she does better than double their voice, she makes it unrecognizable. How often has she not circulated their tiresome paradoxes in the state of magnificent platitudes! And hence it is that at the head of these charming volumes of the *Mare-au-Diable* I find the page I have quoted from, and, right at the beginning, a kind of socialistic pamphlet which is joined on to it, one knows not why. Imagine a bit of Raynal (at his best) bound up by mistake with a copy of *Paul and Virginia*.

I was obliged to say this to acquit my conscience; it is the weak and odd side of a great talent. Now I have but to praise and to marvel in all sincerity. The some-

what ideal scene of rustic labour that the authoress holds up as a contrast to Holbein's allegory, is of a magnificence to arouse the envy of Jean-Jacques and Buffon; it is there that reminiscences of Virgil and of Roman husbandry manifestly return: the artist who is here painting the team drawing a plough in Berry still remembers the oxen of the Clitumnus. But this first grand chapter, interspersed here and there with apostrophes and allusions to the *idle*, with what I call the *Raynal* or the declamation of the present day, I like less than the quite simple and quite rustic story of Germain the *shrewd ploughman.* This narrative begins at the third chapter and forms, properly speaking, the charming idyll of the *Mare-au-Diable.*

The handsome field-labourer Germain, a widower at twenty-eight with three children and still mourning his first wife, finds himself urged by necessity and reason to marry again. Even his father-in-law, Père Maurice, urges him with all sorts of sensible and positive reasons, and Germain yields, though reluctantly, to his persuasions. Père Maurice, when broaching the subject, already had somebody in view: namely, a well-off widow who lives a few leagues away, and is said to be a good match. As there is no question here of a love-match, but of an arrangement between serious persons of mature age, an interview will, in Père Maurice's opinion, explain everything: 'To-morrow is Saturday, he says to Germain, you will leave off work a little sooner, start about two o'clock in the afternoon, and be there by night-time; the moon is full at present, the roads are good, and it is not more than three leagues away'.

All the interest turns round this journey, in which the whole action takes place. It was first intended that Germain should travel alone, mounted on his good mare *la Grise.* But an old neighbour, *la Guillette*, to whom Père Maurice has communicated the plan, takes the opportunity of entrusting to Germain's care her daughter, little Marie, who has just engaged herself as shepherdess quite near the place Germain is going to. Marie appears a mere child, though she is going on to sixteen. The grave and honest Germain might have passed for her father or her uncle. She is entrusted to him; she mounts behind him on *la Grise*, and they start off together, Germain thinking

more of his late than of his future wife, and Marie crying at leaving her mother and her home.

The details of the start, the first trotting of *la Grise*, the latter's dam, *la vieille Grise*, who, grazing near by, recognizes her offspring as she passes and tries to gallop along the edge of the meadow to follow her, all is painted from nature, with a perfect observation and living expression. We have not to do here with an amateur painter, who has crossed the fields to take in a few scenes: the painter has lived there, has dwelt there for years; she knows all about it, she knows the soul of it; she knows the flight of the cranes in the clouds, the song of the thrush in the thicket, and the attitude of the old mare on the other side of the hedge, ' pensive, restless, her nose in the wind, her mouth full of grass which she forgets to eat '.

Germain, after the first moments of silence, begins to talk with the little Marie. She knows the reason of his journey. He talks to her of his children, of little Pierre, his pretty eldest, whom he did not kiss on leaving, and who ran away sulking because his father would not take him with him. He is afraid a new wife may not be all she ought to be to the children of the first marriage. Little Marie answers to everything modestly and with good sense, with that tact of the heart which teaches a woman all the refinements. ' In your place, she said, I would have taken the eldest with me. Surely, having such a fine boy would have made her love you at once '.

' —Yes, if the woman loves children; but what if she does not love them? '

' —Are there women who do not love children? '

But suddenly at the turn of a thicket the mare shies. Who is that they see in the ditch? It is no other than little Pierre who, when his father would not take him, ran on before, and while waiting for him to pass, had gone to sleep. The father's scolding, the boy's coaxing, his determination not to give in and to make one of the party, all these trifles are drawn from nature and set off by a thousand charms. Each naïve touch shows perfect observation. Little Marie acts as a mediator; she arranges everything and points out the facilities. *La Grise* is sturdy and quite able, at a pinch, to carry three persons, especially as two of them weigh so little. Little Pierre will sit in front, as Marie is behind. 'Meanwhile a man who is

working over there at the head of the road, will go and give notice at the farm, to allay anxiety about the little fellow. It was Marie who thought of the road-mender. Marie thinks of everything, devises everything. One feels that this simple child has in her all those natural qualities which make the prudent wife the providence of the home.

One already divines the intention which will direct this chaste adventure. The intention is that, involuntarily, without anybody's scheming, by degrees, Germain shall be brought to say to himself: 'What? I am going a long distance in search of a wife I do not know, who they say is rich, who is proud no doubt, who will think she does me a great honour by marrying me with my three children; and here I have quite near me a simple child, poor, but rich in gifts of God, in qualities and virtues of nature, who would be a treasure in my house and heart'. Germain must insensibly and before the end of the short journey fall in love with this little Marie whom he had hitherto always considered as a child.

Little incidents supervene. Little Pierre is hungry: they must stop, and all three seize the opportunity to take a light repast. 'Peasants do not eat quickly.' They waste an hour; they are late and still have the great woods to traverse. A thick fog rises with night-fall. *La Grise* has a hard task with her burden. They lose their way and are in the middle of the forest. They are forced to dismount and make their way at all hazards, Germain leading the animal by the bridle, whilst Marie carries the little Pierre, who has gone to sleep, and wraps him as best she can in her cape. It becomes more difficult than ever to find the way: 'The fog kept creeping along and seemed to cling to the humid earth'. They wander round and round that cursed *mare-au-diable* (*devil's mere*, as the people of the country call it), and, after many efforts to get away from it, they are ever and again brought back to it as if by a spell. In short, they have to make up their mind to stop and camp, the more so because *la Grise* in a moment of impatience has broken her girths and galloped off alone through the forest. Here, in these two chapters headed *Under the tall Oaks* and *Evening Prayer*, we have a series of delightful, delicate scenes, which have no pendant or model in any idyll, ancient or modern.

Germain, like all men, even the most robust and valiant,

is naturally impatient: little Marie, as women are when they are excellent, is patience itself. In her life as a poor shepherdess in the fields, has she not learned to be contented with little or nothing, to make the best of everything? In the awkward situation in which they find themselves, she manages to keep the child warm and make him a bed, to light a fire with dry branches, and to oppose bad luck with good humour. In presence of this excellence he has never suspected, Germain is astonished. His ideas, without his being aware of it at first, begin to take a certain cast. Meantime nature speaks, the stomach cries out; he is hungry. They may very well, without offence, untie one of the partridges from a certain present of game which he was carrying to his intended. Marie again is the arranger and the steward of this improvised feast. 'Little Marie, the man who marries you will not be a fool!' Such is the idea that irresistibly rises up in Germain's mind, when he sees her so resourceful, so industrious. He was beginning not only to think it, but to say it aloud, and was becoming a little entangled: 'Look, ploughman, your son is waking up', says little Marie.

The boy is indeed awake: he too at once develops an appetite, and begins to chatter. All this pretty talk is here recorded at length with a truth to nature which, carried to this degree, is beyond the knowledge of mothers, and is the unique gift of genius. Marie continues to be busy with little Pierre, she calms his fears, she amuses him, and Germain cannot help remarking: 'There is nobody like you for talking to children and making them listen to reason'. All the time he still talks of his first wife, his poor departed, and curses the expedition undertaken with the object of replacing her. Meanwhile the child says his prayer, in which little Marie prompts him word for word, and, when he comes to a certain part of the prayer where he regularly goes to sleep every evening, his eyes already begin to close; but his own ideas become a little confused at the moment of dropping off, and, vaguely mixing up all he has seen and heard during the evening, he says: 'Little father, if you want to give me another mother, I want you to give me little Marie'. And without waiting for a reply he closed his eyes and dropped off to sleep.

A touching piece of delicacy to make little Pierre, the angel of innocence, the first to express, on going to

sleep, this idea which has hitherto been only vaguely floating in his mind! From this moment Germain does not forbear nursing it and turning it over in a hundred ways. He becomes aware that this little Marie, of whom he had never thought as being pretty, is fresher than a wild rose, and he details to himself the graceful portrait, concluding: 'She is cheerful, she is prudent, she is hard-working, she is loving, she is droll. . . . I do not see what better one could wish'. In the chapter which follows the *Evening Prayer* and which is headed *In spite of the Cold,* there is a moment when I was afraid an awkward bluntness might spoil the purity of the whole: but what can we expect? we are in real life, we are in the country, it is all very well keeping within pure sentiment, there are, as Mme. de Sévigné says, certain palpable *grossnesses* one cannot so easily dispense with. Germain at least overcomes them, he respects the purity of the young girl he has astonished for a moment; he accomplishes his journey, it is morning before he reaches the house of the widow, *the village lioness,* whom he has taken a dislike to even before he sees her. I need not continue this analysis here; I only desired to dwell upon the quite rare and original parts of the idyll, on the first part of the journey. Arrived at the farm where she is engaged as shepherdess, little Marie runs a serious risk with the brutal farmer. She runs away in terror, taking little Pierre with her, and finds Germain in time to protect and avenge her. It is again well that little Pierre is there to tell Germain of Marie's mishap with the farmer: coming from the mouth of the child the story is purified. As a rule little Pierre reappears in all the decisive situations and settles matters; he is the angel, as I have said, the mediator and the bond as it were between the first wife and her who is to be the second. When expression is wanting, little Pierre comes, and he is the living expression.

When once the marriage of Germain and Marie is settled, the painter neglects them a little to describe the wedding ceremony, the rites and customs of the country, which have been partially discontinued at the present time, and which one cannot help regretting: 'For, alas! exclaims Mme. Sand, everything passes away. Only since I have been alive, more changes have taken place in the ideas and customs of my village than during cen-

turies before the Revolution. . . .' O poet, I stop you there and catch you in the act. Pardon me then for seizing upon that involuntary *alas!* which escaped you, and saying: 'Everything passes away, and among the things which pass away, there are some that you yourself regret. Therefore everything was not evil in the past. Everything was not well either, I grant you. But, morally, not less than poetically, there were qualities and virtues which the new age, with its inventions and its industrial and philosophical receipts, has not yet succeeded in replacing. Ah well! since that is so, O poet, is it right then, on the faith of certain unproved systems for which there is no guarantee, to reject so strongly and violently those remnants of a past already shaken? It passes away quickly enough of itself'.

This termination of the *Mare-au-Diable*, in the description of the wedding, seems perhaps a little long; but one is not sorry, after all, to dwell on these pictures of a rural abundance and copious happiness which recall, in their way, the picture of Theocritus in the *Festivals of Ceres*, and that of Virgil celebrating the virtues of the old Sabines: *Casta pudicitiam servat domus*. Mme. Sand, even when she delights in pleasing pictures, has in her the powerful and luxuriant. In spite of her efforts, even in her graceful touches, we are sensible of a nature that is rich and vigorous (*drue*, as they would say in this old language).

La Mare-au-Diable was only the first step in the pastoral path she opened out for herself; *Le Champi* and *La Petite Fadette* mark the second step, which already differs from the first. I will dwell especially, as an example, on *La Petite Fadette*. In the *Mare-au-Diable* the authoress remarks in one place that she is obliged to *translate* the antique and naïve language of the peasants of the district: 'These people, she says, speak too French for us, and, since Rabelais and Montaigne, the progress of the language has been the cause of our losing many old riches. It is thus with all progress, we must resign ourselves to the fact'. Here Mme. Sand does not do so. She regrets those riches; like Fénelon, she regrets that something *brief, naïve, bold, lively* and *passionate*, which animated our old language and which the rustic language has preserved in places. In *La Petite Fadette* she tries to

recover that something and revive it. Under the fiction that it is the *Chanvreur* (the Hemp-dresser) who told her the story in the evening repose, she retains as many as she can of the words and phrases which he employed. She adopts a mixed kind, as if she were telling 'with a Parisian on her right hand speaking the modern language, and on her left a peasant before whom she would not care to utter a sentence or a word that he could not understand. Thus she has to speak clearly for the Parisian, naïvely for the peasant'. It is a delicate problem to solve, and she gets over the difficulty as wonderfully as possible. Courier never succeeded so well. Let us see.

Père Barbeau, a cultivator of the Cosse district, possessed some property, and that in good land. He had a well-built, tile-roofed house, with garden, vineyard and orchard; he had two fields. His meadows yielded hay by full cartloads, and it was hay of the first quality, 'except what grew on the edge of the stream, which was a little *pestered* by the reeds'. He already had three children, when his wife, thinking no doubt that he could afford to have five, and that they would have to make haste because she was a little advanced in years, thought to give him a pair of twins at a time, two *bessons*, as they are called in the country. These two *bessons*, one of whom, called Sylvain or Sylvinet, came an hour before the other, Landry, were alike in every point, and as long as they were children it was difficult to distinguish one from the other. They were fair; they were both very good-looking, had large blue eyes, *well-sunk* shoulders, a straight figure, and were very firm on their feet. All who saw them stopped and marvelled at their likeness, and would go away saying: 'All the same they are a pretty pair of lads'. These two twins or *bessons* are the heroes of the novel entitled *La Petite Fadette*.

We will first make a remark on this half-rustic half-antiquated style, which the authoress has employed and distributed with so much art and felicity throughout the whole of this novel, which is that, though she tries here to be more natural than in *La Mare-au-Diable*, the artificial begins. There are moments when the Chanvreur, who is supposed to be telling the story, forgets that it is he who is speaking, and expresses himself as Mme. Sand would do directly; then he suddenly becomes aware of

it, he reintroduces country words, antique phrases, and that causes a slight unevenness. I hasten to add that this unevenness, on this occasion at least, is not at all disagreeable. *La Petite Fadette* is a most piquant and most happy study. We come across scenes worthy, for delicacy and liveliness of expression, of the pretty romance of *Daphnis et Chloē*. I have said that Mme. Sand applies the method of Paul-Louis Courier ; but, though remembering it, she is less artificial ; by a grace of genius, she does better from the outset, that is to say, with more verve, more life and facility. Even when there is a little imitation, it is more sprightly and from the source, it is Amyot in full current. A singular organization, which has the gift and power of thus absorbing everything and of at once assimilating what suits it ! She must have had her Amyot half-open before her for a sennight, she must have read him off and on, and she absorbed him more abundantly and more naturally than the learned and exquisite Courier during years of imbibing and cabinet study.

The childhood of the two twins is retraced in an adorable manner : the one who is reputed the elder, Sylvinet, soon reveals himself as the more pathetic, the more tender-hearted ; he has more *attachment*, Landry has more *courage*. ‘ It is written in the law of nature, remarks the authoress, that of two persons who love each other, be it love or friendship, there is always one who must give more of his heart, more of himself, than the other ’. The mysterious sympathies which continue, after birth, to link these two beings together, appertain to an obscure physiology which the authoress has felt and divined without going too deeply into the matter ; popular superstitions are brought in without any improbability. The moment when Landry, who passes for the younger of the twins, breaks away, takes the upper hand, and begins decidedly to assert himself as the elder, to fly with his own wings and become a man, is admirably seized. The other, the gentle Sylvinet, remains a child, weaker, more susceptible, a sensitive and delicate, a quite plaintive soul : we have here some shades of analysis and an anatomy of the human heart in which the authoress has excelled. The little Fadette, or little elf, is no other than a little girl of the place, whose family has a rather doubtful

reputation, and who passes for a bit of a witch. This little girl, who at first appears quite ugly, who takes no more care of her appearance than a naughty boy, and is the pet aversion of the village, but who turns out to possess at bottom all the qualities of the mind, imagination and heart, and in the end, under the sudden burst of love, is metamorphosed into a beauty, this little Fanchon Fadet who, under her elfish spirits, conceals treasures of wisdom, here fills the rôle which is usually allotted to women in Mme. Sand's novels; for they always have the fine rôle, the superior and initiating rôle. Mme. Sand, even when she takes in hand an idyll, does not naturally bring to it the gentleness, the tender suavity of a Virgil or a Tibullus; she still introduces pride. The little Fadette is proud before everything. In some of her words we may also see a protest against society in the name of the ill-favoured and intelligent; but, here, all these ideas are arrested in time and clothed in forms so living, so graceful and so little philosophical, that one has neither the opportunity nor the desire to discuss them. Side by side with this poetic creation there is observation of vulgar nature, the handsome Madelon beside the little Fadette, just as in *Jeanne* there was the coquettish Claudie beside the beautiful and chaste shepherdess. All these young hearts, the natural as well as the poetic, those of the girls as well as those of the boys, are known, handled, brought into light by Mme. Sand, as if she had made them. Oh! how many things a poet knows, especially when he has the privilege of being by turns man and woman, like the late soothsayer Tiresias!

I was forgetting the continuation of my analysis, and I will finish it in two words. Landry, the more manly of the twins, is brought to love the little Fadette, and thereby grieves his family, especially his brother the poor Sylvinet, whose caprice it is to be loved exclusively and to possess a whole and undivided heart. But in a novel the characters are only as unhappy as it pleases the novelist to make them. Everything is cleared up: the little Fadette, who has become beautiful, wise and rich, marries Landry and almost cures the sickly Sylvinet with her secrets of natural magnetism. She succeeds even too well; poor Sylvinet one day thinks himself obliged to run away from his sister-in-law without telling anybody his reason. He

will expose himself to war and become a brave man. This Sylvinet is pathetic from beginning to end; he is a sacrificed being, a distinguished and refined nature, not strong enough for happiness, very exacting and willing to give everything; of these elements passionate and feeling souls are composed. Mme. Sand knows it well; she excells in painting these natures which she dominates and sees through so well. In her novels, from *Lélia* to *La Petite Fadette*, how many Sténois! how many Sylvinets!

I shall have little to say about *François le Champi*, that all the world has seen and read. Here at least the rôle of the man is not subordinated nor sacrificed; but that is in revenge as it were, on the ground of his being a foundling, and because society had already sacrificed him. The novel has a more pathetic interest, but offers a less learned and less curious study than *La Petite Fadette*, and that is why I have dwelled on the latter. When I went to see *Le Champi* transferred to the stage, I was afraid of one thing; I feared the improbability, a certain delicacy in this filial love converted into sexual love, even though conjugal and lawful. The idea of Jean-Jacques, calling Mme. de Warens *maman*, was always distasteful to me. Here the situation is saved, as far as is possible, with a simplicity to which the actors, for their part, contributed with a perfect good taste. The woman, Madeleine Blanchet, has no suspicion of this love, and it never occurs to her until quite at the end that she can be the object of it. Even the Foundling does not confess this thought to himself and dare to express it until malevolence has already spoken by the mouth of Mme. Sévère. The characters express their objections to each other, and that relieves and disarms the spectator. Finally the woman, who has not a touch of coquetry, and who, even in her dress, takes care rather to appear prematurely faded, only resigns herself and only seems to consent because all the world wishes it. In a word, the marriage which crowns the devotion of the foundling is not a love marriage, it is a marriage at once of duty, honour and tenderness. Nothing, in my opinion, spoils the wholesome impression of this touching play, and, if the imagination is not entirely flattered on one point, the heart at least is not offended. I say this, knowing at the same time that a few scrupulous souls were still ruffled, for the idea of a mother, even an

adoptive mother, is such a sacred idea! We should not be just towards the play of *Le Champi* if we did not, at least in passing, call attention to the excellent rôle of Jean Bonnin, the ideal of the Berrichon peasant.

Our modern literature is then, thanks to Mme. Sand, in possession of a few pictures of very French pastorals and georgics. And, on this subject, I was thinking of the singular course which the picturesque kind has followed with us. In the seventeenth century the feeling for the picturesque in nature was hardly born, it was not detached nor developed, and, if we except the good and great La Fontaine,[1] we have no living and speaking picture to admire in that period. The Marquise de Rambouillet was accustomed to say: 'Refined minds that love Belles-Lettres never find their satisfaction in the country'. This impression was long-lived; the whole seventeenth century and part of the eighteenth abode more or less by this idea of Mme. de Rambouillet, which is that of every polished and above all spirituelle society. Mme. de Sévigné, in her park, saw little beyond her tall avenues, and then only saw them through the light of mythology and devices. At a later period, did not Mme. de Staël herself think that 'agriculture smelt of the dung-hill?' It was Jean-Jacques who first had the glory of discovering nature in herself and of painting her; the nature of Switzerland, that of the mountains, the lakes, the free forests, he made us love these quite new beauties. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, shortly after, discovers in his turn and describes the nature of the Indies. Chateaubriand afterwards discovers the American savannahs, the great Canadian woods and the beauty of the Roman Campagna. There we have many discoveries, deserts, mountains, the great Italian horizons; what remained to be discovered? That which was nearest to us, in the very heart of our France. As always happens, one ended with the simplest. One began with Switzerland, America, Italy and Greece: it wanted Mme. Sand to discover for us the nature of Berry and Creuse.

Whilst insisting on the admiration which is due to these last productions of Mme. Sand, I have no thought,

[1] This good and *great* La Fontaine was mentioned here not without design, and because there appeared at the same time a little diatribe by M. de Lamartine against La Fontaine (see the *Conseiller du Peuple*, No. 1 of January, 1850.

by the way, of giving her advice : it was a success I desired to verify. Far from me the idea of pretending to circumscribe henceforth within the pastoral circle a talent so rich, so varied, so impetuous! My only counsel, my only wish, is that so great a talent should open up ways for itself, and create as many kinds as it pleases, but that it should never serve a party. Beyond that, let it proceed at its will, let it develop, let it go astray sometimes : it is sure of recovering itself, for it comes from the source. I may say of true talent, as somebody has said of love, that it is a great *recommencer*. What it has once missed, it will seize another time. It is never at the end of its resources, and it often relapses. The moment for criticism to embrace this powerful talent in its course, and to penetrate its nature, has in my opinion not come ; we must let it run still. One may prefer such or such a manner of hers, but it is curious to see her try them all. For my part I prefer, I confess, in Mme. Sand the simple, natural or tenderly ideal productions ; that is what I liked of her at the outset. Lavinia, Geneviève, Madeleine Blanchet, the little Marie in *La Mare-au-Diable*, those are my masterpieces. But there are also some superior and perhaps stronger, more poetic portions in her, which I am far from failing to recognize. It is Jeanne, it is Consuelo ; at the bottom, quite at the bottom, it is always that Lélia nature, proud and sad, which transforms itself, which takes a pleasure in disguising itself and finding acceptance under these disguises, even among those who thought to abuse her to her face. And what is Consuelo, for example, if not Lélia enlightened and better ? In short, every one will have his preferences, but nothing should be forbidden in the matter of art to a talent which is in full course, in full torrent. A proud talent like this one has been brought into the world to dare, to attempt, to make mistakes often, to lose itself like the Rhone, and also to recover itself.

FELETZ, GEOFFROY, HOFFMAN, ETC.[1]

Monday. February 25, 1850.

ON the 11th of this month there died, at the age of eighty-three, an amiable and witty old man who, under the forms of an exquisite politeness and a perfect social urbanity, concealed a strong character, clear and consistent opinions, much practical philosophy; a sage and a happy man who had preserved, in spite of the habits of a critic and an ordinarily pungent wit, a kindly and warm heart, an extreme delicacy in friendship. M. de Feletz was to me the perfect type of a literary gentleman. The last survivor of the generation of writers to which he belonged, he was an honour to it in our eyes; he personified the best side of it; in judging it by him we should form the most favourable idea of it. The name of M. de Feletz is naturally associated with those of Dussault, Hoffman, his old collaborators on the *Journal des Débats*, then called the *Journal de l'Empire.* To speak for a moment of them all is also to render tribute to him.

Tradition has many a time spoken to us of the good days of literary criticism at the epoch of the Consulate and the Empire; one looks back with regret to that brilliant reign of criticism, one would like to see it reborn in a form suitable to our days. We should indeed be a little astonished if, one morning, we found at the foot of our newspapers the same articles of miscellanea, the same feuilletons, and on the same literary questions, regarded from the point of view from which they so strongly interested the readers of that time. Note that I speak here only of those questions and subjects

[1] *M. de Feletz, and Literary Criticism under the Empire.*

which seem to be eternally in the order of the day, Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, La Bruyère, Le Sage. We should, I say, be astonished by the manner in which these subjects were treated: it would appear to us much too easy, much too simple. And as a rule, when one returns, after an interval of some years, to old articles of criticism and polemics, one is struck by the disproportion which appears between those articles themselves and the effect they produced or the memory they left behind. What we say here of others, we may already verify for ourselves. Remember the *Globe*, that so serious, so distinguished paper, which thought itself so little like any other, and which had influence on the younger generation of men of letters, in the last years of the Restoration. Take it up to-day: the articles seem quite small, quite incomplete: they have the effect of clothes become too short for our figure. I know not if we have grown taller, we have grown stouter at least. Many doctrines which then seemed quite new have since won their case and would seem trivial to-day. The first condition for rightly appreciating the old critics and their productions is, then, to change our point of view and carry ourselves back in imagination to the spirit of a period. The essential thing for criticism, for that quite active and practical criticism we speak of, is not so much to have a perfect knowledge of things, as to feel strongly and inspire others with a taste for them, and to find this taste around us. It is possible that, from 1800 to 1814, people were on many points less learned, less erudite than we are to-day; but in respect of literary questions as a whole, everybody gave more attention to them, took more interest in them.

The critic by himself does and can do nothing. Even good criticism acts only in concert with the public and almost in collaboration with them. I will venture to say that the critic is only the *secretary* of the public, but a secretary who does not wait to be dictated to, and who divines, who unravels and puts into words every morning the thought of all the world. And even, when the critic has expressed that thought which everybody has or everybody desires, a great part of the allusions, the conclusions and consequences, a quite living portion still remains in the minds of the readers. I maintain that in

re-reading the old journals and the critical articles which had most success, we never find more than half of the article in print: the other half was only written in the minds of the readers. Imagine a printed page of which we read only one side; the *verso* has disappeared, it is blank, add this *verso* which would complete it, is the disposition of the public at the time, the part of the redaction which they brought to it, and which often was not the least intelligent and least active. It is this disposition itself which, in order to be accurate, we should have to restore to-day, when we judge the old critics, our predecessors.

In 1800, we were at one of those epochs when the public mind tends to reform itself. The struggle was not yet over, but also, already, there was concert and harmony; there was opportunity for guidance. We were issuing from a long and frightful period of licence, eccentricity and confusion. A powerful man was re-establishing the social and political order on its bases. Whenever, after a long period of confusion, the political order recovers its ground and resumes its regular course, the literary order tends to fall in with it and to follow as best it can. Criticism (when there is criticism), under the shelter of a tutelary power, accomplishes its work and places itself at the service of the common restoration. Under Henri IV, after the League, there was Malherbe; under Louis XIV, after the Fronde, there was Boileau. In 1800, after the Directory and under the First Consul, we had in literary criticism the small change of Malherbe and Boileau, that is to say, men of intellect and sense, judicious, well-informed, more or less satirical, who formed groups and understood one another, who restored good order in the things of the mind, and acted as police in Letters. Some did this police duty very honestly, others less so; most of them brought to it a certain passion, but almost all, taking them at their starting point, acted usefully.

At those periods which follow a great danger and when one has just escaped great disasters, one is very distinctly conscious of the good and evil in all things; one is disposed to exclude, to interdict what has been harmful, and that is the moment when the critic finds most support and *collaboration* in the public. The public of honest

people (take the word in as broad a sense as you please) is disposed to lend him a strong hand. The critic may be a brave man, but as a rule he is not a hero, and, like many brave men, in order to show his whole bravery, he needs to feel himself supported. In 1800, there was still enough fighting to make courage needful in the critic who desired to combat the doctrines and the declamations then in vogue or only just dethroned; there was already sufficient support to make heroism unnecessary in the critic. Rather was it necessary for him to moderate and restrain himself at times; for, in the midst of a general praiseworthy return and a salutary loss of illusions, the wind blew in the direction of reaction, and the danger was, as it always is, that he might get out of one wrong current only to rush immediately into another.

Be that as it may, a little exclusion in criticism is not prejudicial to success, when this sharp edge falls justly and bears in the direction of public opinion. That was verified in the case of the distinguished writers we have to speak of; we mean the literary writers of the *Journal des Débats* of that time. About 1801 this paper, under the able management of the Bertins, counted among its contributors Geoffroy, Dussault, Feletz, Delalot, Saint-Victor, the Abbé de Boulogne. About the same time, for the *Mercure*, and in close alliance with the *Journal des Débats*, there were writing La Harpe, the Abbé de Vauxcelles, Fiévée, Michaud, Gueneau de Mussy, Fontanes, Bonald, Chateaubriand. In the opposite ranks one counted Roederer on the *Journal de Paris*; M. Suard and a young virile talent, Mlle. de Meulan (afterwards Mme. Guizot), on the *Publiciste*; Ginguené and his friends the philosophers, in the *Décade*. Lastly, the *Moniteur* sometimes betrayed, in certain impetuous articles, a journalist of an extraordinary nature, who was no other than the First Consul himself. Such was, to take only a very summary view of them, the personnel of the journals under the Consulate. Fierce quarrels were entered upon, furious battles were fought: politics, philosophy were brought into play in the least important literary questions. But at the approach of the Empire, all this ardour gradually dies down, there is much less confusion in the fray. Some of the writers we have mentioned, having become great personages and great

functionaries, laid down the pen. Some of the papers had orders to keep silence or lower their tone. The *Mercure*, in accordance with its natural inclination, soon lost savour, and, except at rare intervals, fell back into insipidity. The *Décade*, before expiring, had altered its name and its spirit. The *Journal des Débats*, under the title of *Journal de l'Empire*, was the only one which prospered and gained every day in public opinion. Gradually constrained to narrow the frame, I will not say of its discussions, but of its simplest reflexions on politics, it developed its literary side, which henceforth became the principal, or rather the only means of its success. In 1807, it had to suffer an internal revolution, a real *coup d'État*. The Bertins, the proprietors of the paper, were ousted; they were destined a few years later to be entirely dispossessed. But the journal they had created lived on. M. Étienne, appointed editor in chief by higher orders, retained the able literary contributors at their posts, and added Hoffman. He was an auxiliary intended to partially counteract the anti-Voltairean spirit of the others. Of these various writers, thus admitted, who had commenced or who then continued in concert the fortune of the journal, four names have remained long associated in our memory as representing literary criticism under the Empire: Geoffroy, Dussault, Hoffman and M. de Feletz, who has just died, as the last of them. Geoffroy died already in 1814, Dussault in 1824, and Hoffman in 1828. Geoffroy, born in 1743, was their senior by many years.

In spite of his shortcomings and even his vices, Geoffroy was a sterling critic, with a very strong sense, a rather heavy hand, but which struck well when it came down in the right place, a remarkable soundness of judgment when it was not crossed by passion or calculation. In order to know a critic well, to form a true idea of his character and person, it is not enough to read his writings. A poet depicts himself in his writings; strictly speaking, a critic does the same, but most frequently with lines that are too weak, too broken; his soul is too much scattered over them. Tradition must aid us to collect his features and set us right, if we wish to recompose his face and his character with any certainty. I have long wished to know what to think of the four celebrated critics of the *Journal*

de l'Empire, only one of whom I was acquainted with: I applied to the latter, M. de Feletz himself; I asked him one day for his own opinion of his former collaborators, and he expounded it to me in very precise terms and with a feeling for shades of colour. In describing the others, he described himself, a sincere and delicate critic. I will repeat, as nearly as possible, his judgment, which is fully confirmed by what I have recently read.

Geoffroy was above all a *humanist*, and one of the most well read. Having left the noviciate of the Jesuits, he competed for a prize awarded by the University, and he gained the prize for three consecutive years. Successively professor at the Collège de Navarre and the Collège Mazarin, he worked besides on the *Année littéraire*. In this paper he reviewed the *Voyage d'Anacharsis*, and with some severity. He knew antiquity well, he knew the seventeenth century well, less well the eighteenth. The *Voyage d'Anacharsis*, M. de Feletz told me, was perhaps the last modern book he read. In general, in his articles for the *Année littéraire*, he aimed more at accuracy than piquancy. He was serious to the extent of appearing a little heavy. He had acquired a taste for the drama in a house where he had acted for a time as tutor. During the thick of the Revolution, he disappeared and obtained a post as teacher in a primary school in a rural district. When the Reign of Terror was past, he returned to Paris; he entered the Hix Institution. It was while he was in that school that it occurred to M. Bertin, with that intelligence which characterized him, to engage him when, having founded the *Journal des Débats*, he felt that it wanted a dramatic feuilleton. Geoffroy was singularly successful in this position. He had enough flexibility to change his manner. One felt indeed that his lightness was not always natural, and that his wrist was heavy: yet he succeeded in instilling life into this branch of criticism and making it bear fruit by introducing questions of the day, and bringing in at every turn controversies which flattered the passions of the time. He had a high salary, a box at the theatre, a carriage to take him there, not to mention the rest. His articles, re-read to-day, have lost much. The professional critic, however, still thinks highly of them, and

finds useful remarks in them. But their vogue in their time was prodigious.

Dussault's attainments were much less extensive than Geoffroy's; he knew Latin well, no Greek or very little; he had not many ideas, but he expressed them with care, and repeated them complacently. He had made a close study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's style, and was fond of borrowing his apostrophes.

Hoffman had a much wider knowledge and more ideas than Dussault; he knew everything, antiquity sufficiently well, geography very well, medicine, not to mention that Hoffman was an *author* in the true sense of the word; he proved this faculty in a few pleasing dramatic inventions, in the pretty *Roman d'une heure*, in the excellent buffoonery of the *Rendez-vous bourgeois*. In short, he was learned with variety, without pedantry, facile with his pen, a little prolix, caustic, which Dussault was not, though on two or three occasions he showed some sarcasm. As for Hoffman, he cut to the quick. Having had occasion once to censure Mme. de Genlis, he said, that one would be puzzled to pronounce on her sex, that she had no longer any sex, or something like it. Having received this broadside from Hoffman, and another from Auger, Mme. de Genlis asked for M. de Feletz to be her judge, and he at least pricked her more agreeably.

Excepting this latter anecdote, that is approximately the judgment which M. de Feletz pronounced on the critics he had known so well, among whom he himself did not hold the least distinguished place. Whilst doing justice to Geoffroy, we feel that he was the man whom Feletz was most unlike, by reason of the latter's polite habits and his tone. Of the three Hoffman was evidently the one to whom he conceded most, and with whom no doubt he would have liked to be placed on the same line, above Dussault, in whom, without expressly saying so, he recognized more form than substance, and more acquirements than wit. All this, well examined, appears to me justness itself.

This Geoffroy, however (I return to him), was a strong and vigorous nature. There are, for modern journalistic criticism, two filiations, two distinct lineages: the one honest, scrupulous, impartial, born of Bayle; the other, born of Fréron. Geoffroy was sprung from this latter

line, but he singularly raised it, at least at his first beginnings, by the energetic, though even a little coarse, boldness of his good sense. He was properly speaking the creator of the dramatic feuilleton ; but he also broached all sorts of subjects. I will distinguish, at his beginnings, an article he wrote on *Gil Blas.* He takes a pleasure, in face of the exalted romances and the systematic inventions of the day, in recalling this quite natural book, which sums up the morality of experience. To those charlatan or credulous philosophers, who on every possible occasion would draw pictures of the progress of the human mind 'from the Deluge to the Directory', he expressly holds up this novel, which is not a novel, which is only the story of human life, a true mirror which shows us men 'such as they are, such as they have been, such as they will ever be'. On the eve of a revolution, when declamations and systems are in full swing, *Gil Blas* appears a little out-of-date and antiquated : on the morrow of a revolution, and when the mad intoxication is slept off, it appears again living and true as before. Jean-Jacques Rousseau says somewhere that, in his youth, a woman of his acquaintance lent him *Gil Blas,* and that he read it with pleasure ; but he adds that he was not yet ripe for that kind of reading, and that at that time he required *novels with grand sentiments.* Whereupon Geoffroy said bluntly : 'Rousseau made a mistake. . . . He must have read *Gil Blas* with pleasure, since it is impossible for a man of intelligence not to find it agreeable reading ; but he is right in saying that he was not yet ripe for such a work, and he never was. All his life long he saw the world only through the cloud of his prejudices ; at twenty years he did not relish the novels with grand sentiments ; at fifty, he composed only novels with grand sentiments. . . .' And if Geoffroy does not say as much, he helps us to the conclusion that Rousseau's politics themselves were only a novel of that kind. Nobody ever entered the literary world with less veneration for the great pre-Revolutionary names than Geoffroy. This man of the school and the theatre, this old professor who was nearly sixty years of age when the eighteenth century expired, had not at any moment been dazzled by the light of that brilliant century. In the drama he considered Voltaire as a usurper,

a sort of *Mayor of the palace* who had laid violent hands on the lawful sovereigns of the stage, Corneille and Racine, and had kept them buried as long as he could in the interior of their palaces. It was necessary to restore them and bring them back to the light of day, to their proper place, above the author of *Mérope* and *Zaïre*. On Corneille, on Racine, on Molière, Geoffroy has some excellent remarks; he points out where the true character of their genius lay. He loves Molière, his frankness, his naturalness, his gaiety; in default of others, these are Geoffroy's own virtues. The fact that a man has faults and worse, is never a reason for despising his talent or his wit. The Abbé Maury and the Abbé Geoffroy, each in his kind and due proportion, are two examples of very coarse-grained natures, but with power and talent. If Geoffroy laid so little restraint upon himself on the subject of Voltaire and Rousseau, the two idols of the century, one may imagine that he was still less constrained when he met on his path the Abbé Morellet, Suard, Roederer, Chénier (Joseph). He was involved in quarrels with them all, in which he was carried away to incredible abuse. I seem to hear one of those third-rate characters in Molière, one of those good bourgeois who let themselves go, and who are not wanting in *jaw*, as they used to say at the time. 'It enfeebles literary criticism, Geoffroy maintains, to go seeking after round-about ways of expressing faults which can be very clearly specified by a single word: applied to the person, this word might be an insult; applied to the work, it is the right word'. And this word he immediately blurts out without thinking any more of his distinction between the person and the work: 'Some of my expressions, he says again, appear to them ignoble and trivial: I would like to be able to find words still more capable of painting the baseness of certain things of which I am obliged to speak. My sentences are not the result of calculation, of a cold intellectual combination; they follow the movements of my soul; it is my feeling that gives me the tone: I write as I am moved, and that is the reason why I am read'. We must admit that the man who feels like that, when he comes to deal a just blow, must deal it vigorously.

Geoffroy essentially lacked distinction, but he lacked

neither wit nor a certain salt. His style easily becomes gross, his expression broad, but in general just and sane. When he is not turned aside by passion nor disturbed by certain calculations, he says things which are definitively true; he is right, in an ungracious way, but he is right. Let us appreciate rightly this essential side of the criticism of former days. Nowadays it is not a rare thing to find, in those who style themselves critics, knowledge, a ready pen, learning, imagination. Give them a new work, they will discourse wonderfully well upon the subject or beside the subject, develop their wit, bring themselves upon the scene, tell you their humours, or retail their learning; they will give you anything except a judgment. They have everything that appertains to the critic except the judicial. They will not dare to commit themselves to the extent of saying: This is good, this is bad. Even those who might be thought most qualified to be oracles of taste, have a certain cowardice in judgment. They exercise their ingenuity, they do their very best to avoid a frank opinion. Now, it is this element of the judicial that I find in a greater degree (if I refer back to the circumstances) in the criticisms of the Imperial epoch.

Geoffroy's faults will be sufficiently evident, and my intention here was above all to point out some of his good qualities without concealing the admixture. He knew antiquity, as I have said; he knew it without subtlety, without softness; and, in the matter of Atticism, he would have had to take a lesson from his young collaborator of that time, M. Boissonade, if Atticism was to be acquired. In translating Theocritus he produced a travesty, by lending him flowers of rhetoric and decking him out with a false elegance. Yet he understood him. He was above all sensible to certain masculine beauties of the ancients, of Sophocles, of Demosthenes; and sometimes, at the end of a dinner, when he started talking of these gods of his young days, his accents would betray a certain emotion, and even tears, in the midst of the enjoyments of the table.

Judicious and sensible as he usually appeared, he was not without a love of paradox; that is the weak side of men who are oracles and who are accustomed to find listeners. It is difficult to resist the temptation of aston-

ishing one's audience. One day he held forth for a long time on Mme. de Maintenon's virtue; he maintained that she was as pure as a Jeanne d'Arc at every period of her life; that was a paradox at the time. Mme. de Maintenon found, on that day, a strange knight in Geoffroy.

In later years he fell off, or at least he appeared to have fallen off more than he had done so far. Strange rumours were in circulation. It must have been very serious to render possible the insertion in the *Journal de l'Empire* itself, on March 15, 1812, of a letter signed with several initials, in which a self-styled *old amateur* lamented the decline of the drama, the slackness of the actors and of criticism. The writer inquired into the causes of this, and dropped allusions which could not have been more transparent. This self-styled old amateur, who got up this insurrection under the very nose of the dictator, was no other than Dussault, who on this occasion lacked neither vigour nor piquancy. Geoffroy replied, on March 20, in an article headed *Mon retour et ma rentrée.* He had recognized Dussault behind the mask, but his reply was weak; instead of defending himself on the essential points, he became exalted, and spoke pompously of enemies: 'Hitherto, he exclaimed, I had easily repulsed shafts hurled from without; but now for the first time have I had to deal with enemies in possession of the fort, who have attacked me in my own paper, at my very hearth; my own house is become their arsenal and citadel'. He applied to his own case the words of Louis XIV in reference to a courtier who criticized Versailles or Marly: 'It is astonishing that Villiers should have chosen my own house to speak ill of it'. Geoffroy began to be infatuated with himself and his own importance, which is a sign of weakness. His head was less sane on the last day than on the first: that is the history of all potentates and dictators. Besides, his position about 1812 seemed impaired on all hands and greatly compromised; it was time for him to die, otherwise the sceptre or the ferule would have dropped from his hands.

Dussault, who had just dealt him this stroke, was also a good humanist, but less thoroughly so than Geoffroy. He was twenty-five years younger. He was educated

at Sainte-Barbe, and his style was always reminiscent of the rhetoric class. His articles, collected under the title of *Annales littéraires*, may still be perused with pleasure, or at least with esteem. Still his studied, compassed elegance is a little commonplace; his judgment does not stand out clearly. He often indulges himself in vague banal expressions, a little beside his subject; he does not come to the point or go to the bottom. He does not dare to trace with vigour the lines of demarcation and the *degrees* among talents. He is neither for nor against Chateaubriand. He does not say too much ill of Mme. de Staël, but he goes still further in speaking well of Mme. de Genlis. He belongs a little to those that Vauvenargues speaks of (in the portrait of *Lacon ou le petit homme*), of those connoisseurs who place Bossuet and Fléchier in the same class, who think that Pascal had much talent, and that Nicole was not lacking in it. He will speak well of Rollin; but who would think of speaking ill of Rollin? Dussault hardly ever goes to the bottom of things. M. Joubert said very well of him and his style which affects oratorical number: 'Dussault's style is an agreeable twitter of birds, in which one can discover no distinct melody'.

Of the four critics here mentioned, and under his ornate exterior, Dussault, when we look into him, appears the weakest.

Hoffman, as M. de Feletz pointed out to me, is in reality much superior. He has many of the qualities of the true critic, conscience, independence, ideas, an opinion of his own. Born at Nancy, with a trace of German extraction, but like a German of the time of Wieland, he soon launched forth into literature, into light poetry, into the lyric kind and operas. That little song which all the world sang in our childhood: *Femmes, voulez-vous éprouver* . . . is his. This was a far cry from the future critic. Yet, in spite of the sports of an agreeable imagination, he at all times fed on sound reading, and he sharpened his judgment in silence. In a quarrel he had, in 1802, with Geoffroy, on the opera *Adrien* (for where is the author of that day who had not a bone to pick with Geoffroy?), the latter said to him, concluding in a masterful tone: 'Believe me, this is a friend's counsel I give you: give up dissertations, you were born to write

operas'. When, in 1807, Hoffman joined the *Journal de l'Empire*, Geoffroy could see whether he had predicted rightly. Hoffman made his début with the *Lettres champenoises*. A self-styled provincial, a member of the Academy of Châlons, describes through the medium of the paper, for a cousin whose address he does not know, all the curious things he sees in Paris. He begins with the meetings of the Athénée, which at that time provided amusement for the satirical. In Hoffman, one feels it at once, the journalist recalls the dramatic author; he introduces into his criticism a little comedy, staging and dialogues: this critic knows how to handle his characters and make them act. In one of his piquant articles on M. de Pradt, he one day took off the playful Archbishop in person, describing the visit he had received from him on his fourth story, and the abuse, the injunctions, the gesticulations, the anathemas of that very unedifying prelate; it is an excellent little play. 'The lecture was a long one, said Hoffman, it was severe; it began, however, with an exposition full of moderation and even of mildness. Several times I tried to place a few words in the short intervals of the homily, but, with a slight motion of his hand, M. de Pradt forced me to silence, and this motion was still so paternal, that I thought I was receiving his blessing'. What made the story more amusing was that Hoffman stuttered a little, whilst the Abbé de Pradt was volubility itself. This slight stutter of Hoffman was not a disadvantage in conversation; it gave him time to weigh his reply, and made his slyness often assume an air of naïveté. In his criticism, however, Hoffman liked serious and continuous subjects; he wrote some series of articles on magnetism, on craniology, on geography and finally on the Jesuits. He used to read everything he had to discuss, an essential condition and yet rarely found in the critical profession, and which Dussault himself did not always fulfil. Afflicted at night by insomnia, he read continually, and being gifted with a capacious memory, he forgot nothing he had once read. An accurate, sincere and scrupulous mind, possessing the art of delicate irony, he lacked an elevated sense of poetry. He betrayed this deficiency when he had to speak of Chateaubriand's *Martyrs*, of Guizot's *Shakespeare*, of the first Odes of M. Victor Hugo. One might find, how-

ever, some just remarks in what he says of Walter Scott's novels, which excited much enthusiasm at the time, an enthusiasm that would listen to no limitations. He analyses and very capably disentangles the true causes of the interest they arouse; he points out what that supposed and so much talked of historical fidelity amounts to. The positive portions of Hoffman still deserve to be read. He was an enemy of infatuations and all kinds of charlatanism, which is a true character and sign of the critic.

His life, towards the end, was that of an original and a philosopher who desires before everything to provide for his independence. He would decline any dinner where he was likely to meet a single author who fell under his jurisdiction. He took his rôle of critic very seriously, fearing visits, declining the honour of belonging to the Academies; he exaggerated in his own mind the burdens imposed on members, which were at that time perhaps more weighty than they are now. Placed between an expediency and a truth, he would have feared equally to sin against in either. Thus he grew old in his retirement at Passy, a solitary man, in the midst of his books, hardly ever talking with the living except with his pen in his hand, a critic full of integrity, well informed, worthy of esteem, even when he erred.

M. de Feletz, who so well appreciated Hoffman, resembled him in some qualities, but in other respects he was quite himself. A man of the world, most amiable and trustworthy in intercourse, he never regarded society as an obstacle to his intellectual nature and his labour: he would regard it rather in the light of inspiration. When I said *labour*, I used an incorrect term. M. de Feletz, when writing, only chatted and conversed. Born in Périgord, sprung of a noble family, after some excellent schooling at Sainte-Barbe, where he even taught, for some years, philosophy and theology, he had passed through the Revolution with dignity and firmness, suffering all the persecutions which honoured their victims. In 1801, still young and already mature, he found himself quite prepared for letters and the renascent society. He made the most of them. He lived in the best society, where he was extremely sought after. In the mornings he would read those authors, then being reprinted, who

are the masters of life, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, *Don Quixote*, Hamilton, the Abbé Prévost. He wrote in an easy tone, without any cut and dried notions, what a just and shrewd mind finds to say about them after a first reading. His classical knowledge permitted him to speak of Latin authors, of the translations then in vogue, in a manner to satisfy the educated and to attract the man of society. His theological and philosophical attainments also enabled him, when occasion offered, to touch upon serious subjects. He approached all topics, passing lightly over those he did not enter deeply into, and not without archness. His extreme politeness, which linked him in a thousand ways with numberless acquaintances, did not prevent his raillery, when it had to vent itself, from gliding into his articles in one way or another, into the turn, into his reticence; he could make himself understood without being explicit. The grain of salt came in at the end, in a quotation, in an anecdote. In his manner of ending, in the cast of his sentence, he had a certain motion of the head which we knew well; he had something of the Abbé Delille in prose. The subjects which most suited his habits and tastes were those which concerned the eighteenth century. On the Letters of Mme. Du Deffand, of Mlle. de Lespinasse, on the Memoirs of Mme. d'Épinay and the Correspondence of the Abbé Galiani, he wrote some just pages which we may read with pleasure. He made a correct estimate especially of Mme. Du Deffand, the *clear-sighted blind* lady, as she was called, that mind which was much too penetrating to be indulgent. Speaking of the accurate and severe criticisms she pronounced on her contemporaries, he said: 'Mme. Du Deffand would have made no doubt an excellent though rather a bitter journalist . . . the picture she presents of society reveals a mind which sees things not in a favourable light, but correctly; a brush which does not flatter, but is faithful; with her satiric touches she will paint you a man from head to foot'. He, the journalist who was satiric, but without bitterness, knew well that one cannot do that. In many cases a bust is already too much. Two or three strokes at the most, which should be toned down besides, that is as much as the proprieties authorize. Even when the game was at its fiercest, he always observed them. In

his day M. de Feletz was, properly speaking, the critic of good society.

In this life of pleasant occupation, in which work itself seemed only an ornament of leisure, without any other ambition but that of cultivating his tastes and friendships, M. de Feletz, as he grew older, quite naturally attained to literary honours. The kind of criticism he represented was, for the first time, crowned in him. The person, no less than the writer, merited this choice. I for my part had the good fortune of knowing him in the inner circle of the Academy and at the Mazarin Library, of which he was then a trustee. It was through coming into close contact with him that I had the privilege of fully appreciating this mind still young, rich in anecdotes and pleasant discourse, full of reminiscences of his time, by no means closed to the things of our time. One could not meet an old age that was less sour and peevish and better company, in the sense in which the word was formerly used. For some years almost blind, he had ceased to go into society, but society came to him. He was blind like Mme. Du Deffand, like Delille, especially like the latter, and to the last enjoyed the pleasures of life. It was good to see how he got enjoyment out of everything, himself and others, how his face would immediately light up at a souvenir, a happy thought, whether uttered by himself or another. This amiable exterior concealed a strength which is the characteristic of that race of men of the eighteenth century. Threatened in his position of trustee on the morrow of the February Revolution, and finally struck by M. de Falloux, from whom, less than from any other, he should have expected such a blow,[1] he wrote on this subject, he dictated several letters full of dignity, vigour and shrewdness, which

1 M. de Falloux, Minister of Public Instruction and erstwhile Legitimist, author of the *Histoire de Saint Pie V*, retained at the head of the division of Letters M. Génin, one of the editors of the *National*, and the most passionate of anti-Jesuit and anti-ecclesiastic writers, whose pen was dreaded ; a man of intellect and study, but at the same time prejudiced and acrimonious, he hated M. de Feletz and had already tried to procure his dismissal during the Ministry of M. Carnot. One pretended to believe that M. de Feletz himself wished to resign his office of trustee : that it would be a kindness to deprive him of it. M. Carnot thought so for a moment ; but soon, better informed about M. de Feletz's true intentions, he did not hesitate to recall a first decision. M. de Falloux acted towards M. de Feletz as M. Carnot had refused to do.

certainly did not proclaim a failing power of thought. He did not allow that one could envelop in forms more or less graceful an act that was at bottom iniquitous. The blow, however, was painful and keenly felt, especially under the disguise of an expedient: it was the only grief of his last years, so happy and comforted in other respects. Truth alone obliges us to touch upon this painful point which all the world will be silent about.

He will soon be better praised by others. I only wished here to recall a few reminiscences of a henceforth vanished generation. Those distinguished critics who signalized the opening of the century were useful; they had their originality in the clear and vigorous good sense with which they opposed continued admiration which was being wasted upon second and third-rate writers: they cut short the continuation of the eighteenth century. Continuations in literature are never of any value. No doubt they showed as a rule more opposition than inspiration, more *veto* than initiative. As they drew away from their starting-point of 1800, they lost some of their utility of action and clearness of view; they had need of a decisive crisis to enlighten them, and they groped a little in the dark when new complications supervened. However, a just recognition should attach to their names. We, too, have returned to one of those epochs when one is very well aware that criticism, even that which confines itself to resisting the false and the declamatory, would have its value.

M. PARISET[1]

Monday, March 4, 1850.

By virtue of his office as Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Medicine, M. Pariset has had to deliver, either at the public sittings, or at the funeral ceremonies, the Eulogies of the principal physicians who were members of that Academy and who died between 1820 and 1847. It is the collection of these various Eulogies or Discourses which his honourable successor, M. Dubois (of Amiens), is just now publishing, and he joins to it as an introduction a remarkable Eulogy of M. Pariset himself. I will say, on this occasion, a few words both on this kind of composition and of the men who have brought it to honour in our country. I am speaking here of the academic Eulogy so far as it applies solely to sciences and to savants.

It was Fontenelle who gave us the first example of it, and the model, an inimitable model. The seventy Eulogies which he delivered in the course of forty years form the richest and most interesting collection one can imagine. His manner is quite his own, and it would be a want of taste to try to deprive him of any of it. This manner is as academic by reason of its politeness, as it is unacademic by reason of the remaining qualities or even the slight defects which compose it. The Eulogy here never rises to the oratorical tone, and constantly affects the tone of a clear and simple Notice. But Fontenelle's simplicity, in its rare distinction, resembles that of no other: it is a quite exquisite simplicity, to which he returns by force of intellect and almost of subtlety. His expression is just, extremely appropriate, always accurate on reflexion, witty, sometimes pretty, often epigrammatic, even when serious.

1 *Academic Eulogies*. By M. Pariset. Published by M. Dubois (of Amiens) (2 vols., 1850).

What strikes us especially, is the contrast of this expression, very often a little thin, with the greatness of the mind which embraces and surveys the loftiest subjects. The result is a kind of disproportion which is indeed a little disconcerting, but to which we become reconciled when once we are accustomed to the air and ways of this superior guide. Fontenelle tried at the outset, and with success, to preserve the Eulogies of learned men from the disadvantage which is almost inherent in the literary panegyric, I mean pompousness and exaggeration. His principle was that only at the last extremity and reluctantly should one give way to the sublime.

Condorcet also kept himself free, in his Eulogies, from literary pomposity, but not always from philosophic declamation. A superior mind himself and a friend of the truth, but an ambitious friend, and much less sheltered than Fontenelle from the excesses and contagions of his time, Condorcet has his own ideas which he too complacently introduces into his *exposé* of others' ideas. He treats his subjects more thoroughly, that is his merit; but at the same time he too often intervenes, he argues and discusses. Whilst Fontenelle, insensibly and without appearing to do so, gave the natural explanation of many things, Condorcet loses no opportunity of stating, in passing, his principles, his solutions, and he has his solutions on every subject. He flatters himself on having progressed a step beyond Fontenelle and even d'Alembert: where the latter thought wise to doubt, Condorcet no longer doubts, and he communicates his certainty to us. Even when not prejudicial to impartiality, it is not the mark of a strictly good taste in a biographer, to make these frequent digressions. Without, in fine, denying to his style every kind of literary quality, it is impossible not to be conscious of heavy and lengthy sentences, of portions which are opaque as it were, and which prevent our penetrating their light and charm.

A contemporary of Condorcet, Vicq-d'Azyr, was the first who had to deal more particularly with physicians in his Eulogies, and he did so with much éclat at the time. Vicq-d'Azyr was Permanent Secretary of the Society of Medicine founded in 1776, and he was deservedly admitted to the French Academy in 1788, in the place of Buffon. Somebody said of him that he was the Buffon of medicine,

and this praise, reduced to its right proportions, expresses sufficiently well his qualities and defects. A learned physician and anatomist, Vicq-d'Azyr possessed besides a rich and flexible talent for writing and painting, which he applied not only to literary and academic subjects properly speaking, but even to purely scientific descriptions; that is to say, he rather abused his talent. His Eulogies must have been singularly pleasing in his day; for, if we read them without prejudice, they still appear very noteworthy to us, and those parts which offend or raise a smile are precisely those which at the time no doubt gained most applause. For example, in the Eulogy on the great physicist Duhamel, announcing that he will first consider him as an agriculturist, the orator-biographer will tell us that 'the first *flowers* he will cast on the tomb of M.Duhamel should be *plucked in the field he has cultivated*'. Speaking of the experiments of this savant in grafting, he says: 'We learn from his work that two saps intended to circulate together should have a definite relation to one another, and that it would be vain to join branches not formed for each other by nature. *So, two persons whom one has the cruelty to join in spite of disproportions of age and inclination, are never truly united, and a conflict is set up between them which only ends with their days*'. Can you not hear the flattering murmurs which must have received this passage against ill-assorted unions? Can you not see the prettiest hands eager, by their applause, to protest against the chains with which they thought themselves loaded? Further on, when Duhamel discovers that a certain disease in grains is caused by a very small insect concealed in them, Vicq-d'Azyr speaks of the good man who is a prey to obscure enemies as to a hidden insect, When Duhamel invents a contrivance for drying cereals, and places this contrivance in a tower surmounted with wings like those of a wind-mill, Vicq-d'Azyr sees in it 'a monument raised by patriotism, truly worthy to adorn the house of a philosopher, and very different from those ancient towers. . .' There follows a little digression against Gothic and feudal towers. That is a vein of bad taste in Vicq-d'Azyr, which compromises the very real interest, the sound and pleasing merit of the whole. We might find more or less of this vein in all his Eulogies. In that on Haller, one of the most admired bits was the passage

where he described Haller and his friend the poet Gessner botanizing together in the high mountains, and Gessner, overcome by fatigue, lying down and falling asleep in an icy atmosphere: 'M. de Haller, he said, saw with anxiety his friend yielding to a sleep which the cold might have rendered fatal. He thought how he might save him from this danger; soon this means presented itself to his thought or rather to his heart. He stripped off his garments, he covered Gessner with them; and *regarding him with complacency*, he enjoyed this *spectacle* without making any movement, for fear of interrupting its duration. Let those who know the charms of friendship imagine Gessner's awakening, his surprise, and their embraces; let them imagine in short, in the midst of a desert, this touching scene so worthy of admiring onlookers!' And I ask how it is possible to know so well what passed on Haller's face *regarding his friend with complacency*, in a scene that had no witnesses, since Gessner at first was only a sleeping figure; and Haller was no doubt too much occupied with his friend to think of his own attitude. Here we catch Vicq-d'Azyr in what I may call the Louis XVI taste or genre in literature, which is already different from that of Louis XV. The Louis XVI genre, which prevailed till 1791, is essentially honest, florid and smiling; it is inspired by a virtuous sentimentalism. Beneficence, reform, hope, love of the good, a brilliant and rather amiable optimism, those are the moral characteristics which distinguish it, and the whole is readily translated into an elegant, rather soft and too smooth style. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in certain pictures, offers us the ideal of it. More usually there glides into it something of Florian, of Gessner, and even of Berquin. There is a little of it in this Alpine scene between the two friends as described by Vicq-d'Azyr.

This enervated style should never be adopted in Eulogies devoted to men of learning, and a great sobriety is the first elegance. If I have spoken of Vic-d'Azyr in connexion with M. Pariset, it is because the latter, in spite of the interval of time, may be truly considered as his successor. The old Society of Medicine having been abolished in 1793 and the new Academy of Medicine only established in 1820, there was no occasion, between Vicq-d'Azyr and M. Pariset, for another Permanent

Secretary. Independently of the Society of Medicine, let us not forget that there existed besides, under the *ancien régime*, the Academy of Surgery, of older foundation (1733) and very illustrious by reason of the names and works of its members. This Academy had its principal permanent Secretary in the person of the famous surgeon Louis, whose Eulogies are for the most part still unpublished. The great gulf of separation which existed at the time between surgery and medicine prevented the two societies from amalgamating at any moment or even approaching each other, as would have been so natural. But to-day the Academy of Medicine equally represents and continues them both.

M. Pariset is then, after Vicq-d'Azyr, the first academic biographer who had to deliver as great a number of Eulogies on physicians. He was endowed with several indispensable qualities for this delicate office, and he did not always show himself free from the faults which should be avoided. I will try to consider him from both his sides with sincerity and the proper circumspection in these mixed matters, where the literary critic is judge of only one side.

Étienne Pariset, born in 1770 in the Vosges, was educated by the Oratorians at Nantes, and soon distinguished himself there by a brilliant facility. The Revolution, which surprised him at the age of twenty, interrupted his career: he was a student in medicine, he became a soldier; he again became a student after the Terror, and attended at Paris the Courses of lectures of every kind which signalized the confused renascence of the epoch of the year III. He had become very intimate with Riouffe, who had made himself very prominent by his book on Prisons and his relations with the Girondists, and was the Silvio Pellico of the moment. Pariset, poor, unknown, protected by Riouffe, who procured him a post as tutor in a rich family, was so grateful for these marks of affection, that he married Mme. Riouffe's mother, desiring to have henceforth no other family but that of his friend. What characterized from that time this excellent and amiable man we are concerned with, was a great want of reserve, a heart which overflowed around him, a lively imagination which was also expansive, instead of employing and concentrating itself upon some fruitful subject. For a moment he had dreamed of the glory of Letters, of the

drama. He had composed a tragedy in imitation of Sophocles, an *Electra*, upon which he founded all sorts of hopes like the Perrette of the *Pot-au-lait*. This milk-pail of the *Electra* was soon upset like all the other milk-pails. Pariset had also attempted a translation of Xenophon's *Retreat of the Ten Thousand*; and that, he tells us, to please his wife's father, who apparently liked Greek or warfare. He was very intimate, at this epoch, with the little philosophical society of Auteuil, with Cabanis, Mme. de Condorcet, Fauriel. I have before me some interesting letters of his to Fauriel, which he wrote during an excursion to the Pyrenees in the summer of 1803. They very well depict the diversity of that mobile mind, which imagines it has overcome all prejudices, and still entertains every kind of illusion. The political events which then filled France with joy and enthusiasm had cast a great gloom over the little society of Auteuil, which represented the men of the previous period, the honest and discontented republicans. Fauriel was cast down and hopeless like a young man who sees his dream shattered for the first time. Pariset adopts the tone of a sage, of a deeply hardened and consummate philosopher; he says to him: 'Eh quoi! is your grief not yet worn off? are your regrets still as keen? and cannot you reconcile yourself to the things of this world? have you not yet reached that calm which despair produces? Imitate me, my friend; you have seen me bear the same anxieties as yourself; but, on thinking over them, I have substituted the right for the fact, and have convinced myself that the actual events follow as necessary effects upon necessary causes, and that, if they do occur, it is because they had to occur in that way and not otherwise. Everything is bound together in humanity, as in the laws of nature; and when great acts of injustice are committed with impunity in our miserable human kind, I defy you to say which is most to be condemned, the guilty or the witness. Starting from that principle, I have made up my mind to be silent and to submit. Not that I have not preserved the same principles; but one must hide them under the bushel. Provided that my conduct do not absolutely belie them, I shall think myself irreproachable'. He goes on to develop this idea of a secret doctrine which one should reserve to oneself and a select

number: 'As regards you, my friend, believe me, you were born, luckily for yourself, a few centuries too soon. From this moment, reconcile yourself to the idea that you will never see the realization of anything you expect to be realized among us. Reserve your secret doctrine for a small number of reliable friends, into whose bosom your soul may pour itself out without constraint, and who are worthy of cultivating philosophy with you and paying honour to truth. For the rest of mankind, never open your heart to them. . . .' Note that the man who gives this advice was the most unreserved of men, who to the last was to close up his heart less than any other. He seemed to believe however that the future, a very distant future, would make up to humanity for all the ills of the present; he combined in a certain measure disenchantment and chimeras. He continued for himself to form I know not what plans whose success he thought infallible, and the secret of which he intended to confide to his friend. 'So far, he added, I have but one wish, that is to spend a good week in retirement with you, and to intoxicate myself with the delights of friendship and Letters. I expect that your work on La Rochefoucauld (Fauriel was then writing a Study of that moralist) will be finished. Will you take me into your confidence before the public? Well, that man saw everything in the human heart. It may be that once, a long time ago, others of its springs were set going; but modern people for a long time yet will be such as he painted them. It is an ugly picture of an ugly model, but there is truth in it'. Thus spoke about La Rochefoucauld the man who was to compose so many Eulogies and to show himself the most voluble of panegyrists.

At that date however Pariset was not yet a physician. It was not till two years later, about 1805, that he was admitted to the doctor's degree at the age of thirty-five. One understands already that he will never be a great practitioner. He belonged to that school of physicians who are men of wit and littérateurs, who are able to hold forth on things with more or less eloquence and charm, who obtain favour with the world of society, but never acquire much authority with their peers. I will not say that Cabanis was the master of that school; Cabanis was too conscientious, too really learned to deserve being thus

classed, and he can only figure at the head of that group by reason of his talent as a writer and physiologist painter. The physician Roussel, who wrote on *Woman*, might rather be called the type of this class of mixed writers. Alibert himself, in spite of the specious magnificence of his work, might be assigned to it. Richerand, although a surgeon (which seems to imply an obligation to be positive) essentially belonged to it. They all more or less laid pretensions to the brush in subjects which demand before everything exactness and observation.

The best moment for Pariset's appearance would have been that when Alibert and Richerand appeared on the scene, but he was not quite ready yet, and it was not till the Restoration period that he first became known. During the first days of the Restoration, in May, 1814, M. Roger (the member of the French Academy) once said to M. Beugnot, during the latter's very short term at the Ministry of the Interior: 'There is a post of physician vacant at Bicêtre; to deal with madmen, you want a man of wit: take Pariset'. Pariset was appointed. His biographer describes him, 'in the midst of that melancholy population of demented, like a philosopher or rather like a poet gone astray'. The spectacle of mental maladies furnished him above all with a vast field of reflections for that study of the human understanding, for which he had acquired the taste and, as he believed, the method, in the society of Cabanis. The public Courses of lectures which he held on these subjects at the Athénée, and later at the Société des Bonnes-Lettres, have not been collected; they left a vivid memory with those who heard them. We may believe that at the different epochs, and in these different places, Pariset did not quite profess, with the same rigour, the same ideas whose first source was to be traced back to the society of Auteuil and to Cabanis. He must have been bolder at the Athénée, more cautious at the Bonnes-Lettres; the fluctuations showed the influence of times and shores. He more or less applied that doctrine of the *secret* which we saw him early trying to impress upon himself. But in these Lectures he is able above all to show himself an animated, interesting, picturesque extemporizer, an ardent anatomist before these worldly people, describing in a visible manner the apparatus of the senses, developing them with expression

and gesture, following with his finger in space the smallest nervous threads, the thinnest fibres, unfolding in a never-ending way considerations not very precise nor conclusive, but often ingenious and delicate as their objects. His Lectures were in every respect an agreeable spectacle, and Pariset, in his professional chair at the Athénée appeared the living definition of the voluble man.

That is not quite the same thing as being eloquent. But Pariset had assuredly a rare faculty, which only required to be more contained in season to acquire its full force and elasticity. In 1819 he wished to be a member of the Prisons Board : 'You know my projects relatively to the prison inmates, he wrote to one of his friends ; I have in my mind a *Petit Carême* (little set of Lent Sermons) for their benefit, and an inner voice tells me that I shall accomplish in this way what has never been done before, some real conversions to good life'. This *Petit Carême* which he had in his mind remained, like so many other ideas of his, in the state of a project. There was in Pariset's sentence indeed something of Massillon's diffuseness. But, take notice ! it is the faults of Massillon which here become the good qualities of Pariset. There is one he resembles much more than Massillon, that is Garat, the fine talker on every matter, Garat, the academic orator and professor of ideology at the Athénée. What was Massillon at the end of the seventeenth century is Garat at the beginning of the nineteenth.

On October 26, 1819, during the sitting of the General Prisons Board at the Ministry of the Interior, M. Decazes passed on to Pariset a little note in which he had written : 'Would it be *agreeable* to you to go to Cadiz to observe the yellow fever ?' After a very short moment of reflection Pariset replied : 'Yes, certainly, Monseigneur'. And thus it was that he found himself launched on his various travels, first to Cadiz, then to Barcelona, then finally to the East, and engaged, in consequence, in that great controversy which made such a stir, on the question of contagion. He had formed his opinion before quitting Paris, he believed in contagion ; and, in the account he published of his first journey, he naïvely told how he had no sooner arrived at Madrid, when he was already dreaming of a vast system of lazarettos which would have embraced all Europe in its net-work. The amusing point

about this first journey to Cadiz was that Pariset and his travelling companion only arrived in that city on the very day when the scourge was dying out, and almost to the sound of the bells ringing the *Te Deum* of deliverance. Pariset was able to see only a small number of mild cases which were approaching convalescence. He assisted at only two *post-mortem* examinations: 'Never, he says, will the impression which the sight of the two corpses made upon me be blotted from my mind. From a distance, on the shoulders of the hospital attendants who carried them to the amphitheatre, they showed the *squallentem barbam* and the *concretos sanguine crines* of Virgil; but what it is impossible to paint, is the faces swollen, as after strangulation . . .' And he continues to describe the two corpses in poetical style. His companion drew up the observations on the two cases in medical style. All this, decked out with considerations and hypotheses and augmented by travel impressions, furnished matter for a large *quarto* volume.

But I must hasten to come to Pariset's Academic Eulogies. His manner is broad, facile, happy; his talent, like his heart, is effusive. Whether it be Corvisart, Pinel, Dupuytren he is considering, he takes a broad hold of them, he places them in their frame with ease, but his drawing of them is not rigorous enough. The distinction between the different physiognomies is not brought out with sufficient clearness under his pen. Even under the flowing folds of a drapery one should always perceive the lines of the nude. In Pariset, the anatomy is too often defective, even the moral anatomy: in painting his persons, he has not, and does not sufficiently render, the sense of reality. There are some fine parts however, some very well told anecdotes, some little scenes of a dramatic effect. Speaking of Pinel, for example, one of the men he knew best, and who was quite the opposite of himself, who essentially lacked elocution and fluency, Pariset characterizes in excellent terms 'that broken style, without joints, without coherence, devoid of grace and flexibility. Pinel wished, Pariset tells us, to see medicine follow the example of botany and natural history, and form a language of its own, consisting entirely of substantives, without verbs and conjunctions. He flattered himself with the hope that by that means it would attain to the energetic conciseness

of an aphorism. But conciseness does not exclude the common links of speech; and, for lack of those necessary connexions, Pinel's sentence, dry and meagre, has sometimes an abrupt movement which makes it fatiguing'. Pariset describes how Pinel, when teaching, 'disposed with difficulty of his ideas, brought them out laboriously and with jerky efforts, *as if to overcome their coherence and to separate them one from the other*'. One could not express it better; and certainly that is not the fault that can be laid at Pariset's door. Not of him can one say that he had a strangled style, as Voltaire called it. He has number, he deploys his sentence indefinitely. As soon as he opens his mouth, his speech abounds and crowds to his lips, but he does not sufficiently control it. The moderate kind also has its dangers and as it were its excesses. Cicero remarked very well that those who are not on their guard and yield themselves to this kind of facility 'are in danger of falling into a loose and dangling style, which is called thus because it indeed dangles to and fro, like a disarticulated limb which has neither nerve nor power'. That is just the contrary of the dry, brief, nervous language which Montaigne affects, and which, when needful, has the knee power of the Basque.

The idea he had formed to himself of the academic style contributed to lead Pariset astray and make him abound in the exaggerations of his nature. It is evident that, when writing the simple Eulogy of a savant, he thought too much of the Funeral Oration; he was much fonder of reading Bossuet and Fléchier than Fontenelle. That is especially perceptible in the exordia of his Eulogies on Larrey and Desgenettes, where he adopts, very nearly, the tone of the hymn or at least that of the epopee. One is at once sensible of an imagination which has been exalted by all sorts of oratorical and Pindaric reminiscences. I would much rather that, before commencing to write the Eulogy of a physician, one read first Fontenelle's Notices of Dodart and Boerhaave, not in order to imitate them, but to get the right key and prevent oneself from forcing the note.

It is not so much Pariset that I am criticizing at this moment as the academic style itself, which it is time, especially in the order of the sciences, to bring back to the truth and to lower a peg. However, this semi-revolution,

this reform which I am calling for, is partly accomplished, and the cause may seem won with good minds. I leave aside the living, in order not to appear to be flattering anybody: but let us listen to Cuvier in the preface to his collection of Eulogies: 'The little biographies written with sympathy, he says, to which one has given the name Historic Eulogies, are not only testimonies of affection which learned bodies think they owe to their members whom death has removed from their midst; they offer also to the younger men useful examples and hints and to literary history precious documents'. That is the true idea of this kind of composition, expressed with modesty by a superior man who was himself practised in it. So I am always pained when I see somebody who is afraid of expressing a simple thing in an historical Eulogy, from I know not what scruple of dignity or false propriety. Would you like quite a little example? Corvisart in his younger days is informed that there is a post of physician vacant at the Necker Hospital: he calls upon the estimable foundress, Mme. Necker; but, notwithstanding the custom, he does not wear a wig. Now, it would appear that in this case a wig was the more necessary on account of the physician's youth, since he needed something to impress the patients. The place is offered to him, but on condition of his assuming the time-honoured peruke. Corvisart is greatly in need of the place, but he refuses, preferring to wear his own hair. The anecdote is told pleasantly enough by Pariset; however, instead of saying the *Necker Hospital* and mentioning the foundress by name, he speaks of an establishment 'which a celebrated lady had founded in the direction of Vaugirard': he beats about the bush, as if he wished to define this lady, and did not dare to: 'Simplicity, he says, is not always a companion of beneficence. It appears that sharp and strange words were exchanged between the two interlocutors; and a proof that the lady's mind went astray in the dialogue is the strange condition she wished to impose. . . .' The reader is a little puzzled by these vague allusions and may well go astray himself. I was not quite sure whether Mme. Necker was the lady in question, until I read Cuvier's Eulogy of Corvisart, where I found this lady clearly designated after her husband, for Cuvier himself does not go so far as to mention her by name.

O academic periphrasis, what would you be at? At the very moment when you are laughing at perukes, do not at least put them into your style.

'There are some, says Pascal, who mask all nature; with them there is no king, but an *august monarch:* no Paris, but a *capital of the kingdom.* There are occasions when we should call Paris Paris, and others when we should call it the capital of the kingdom'. This remark of Pascal, rightly understood and rightly applied, contains the whole reform of the academic Eulogy as I understand it, from the point of view of style. Let us never mask either nature or man.

When I say that we should not mask man, it is not because I have the grossness to think that everything should be expressed. There are corners of the truth which show more pleasingly under a light veil. In the Eulogy of Portal, wishing to allude to the so well-known quackery which this physician employed at first in order to make himself known, Pariset, after crowning him with every kind of praise, adds at the end that 'his only wrong was, perhaps, in his early years, to mistrust the future, to disbelieve the natural effect of his talents, and wish to attach wings to his fortune'. These *wings of fortune* are rather happily thought of. It was the occasion, for a well-trained audience, to smile and applaud. However, these graces are too much like those spurious poetic beauties by which clever versifiers pique themselves on elegantly avoiding the right word; they have the appearance of a game, and do not survive the little success of the moment.

I have given myself a serious pleasure. Pariset wrote the Eulogies of Corvisart and Pinel, and, saving the faults of detail I have pointed out, he succeeded with distinction. Cuvier likewise wrote Eulogies on those two men, and joined to them that of Hallé, thus uniting the three figures in one frame. After reading Pariset on Pinel and Corvisart, I at once took up Cuvier on the same subjects, and I perceived the great difference there is between a well-informed, voluble man like Pariset, who has ardour, colouring, sensibility, but who often overflows and wanders, and a mind of the first rank, always master of himself and his subject, who, hastening on, touches upon all the essential points, neglects none of the man's characteristics, outlines the principal features

of his doctrines without ever turning aside, marks in passing the relations, the dependencies, of the different branches, signalizes the positive influences, raises or removes objections. There is a passage in the Eulogy of Pinel where, without naming Broussais, Cuvier defends Pinel against him, his adversary having accused him of creating *occult beings, metaphysical affections* in medicine. Here Cuvier comes and places himself as it were between Broussais and Pinel, without entering the fray, but as a peaceable and just arbiter. Cuvier's Eulogies, set over against those of Pariset on the same subjects, have the effect of a neat, severe and perhaps rather meagre drawing, which is reposeful after such a diffusion of colours and satisfies the eye of the mind.[1]

Pariset had to praise Cuvier himself after the death of the great naturalist, and this Eulogy offers some fine and interesting parts. But, vast as was the subject, Pariset had not the power to keep within it. At one moment his own imagination breaks loose; he sees in the vast spectacle of the revolutions of the globe only a theme for variations. He is carried away by his lyricism: he himself essays his hypothesis at all risks, he outlines a picture of the last great catastrophe of which the globe was the scene. Then suddenly he exclaims, almost like the distracted classical poet: *What am I? whither am I going?* for he feels very well that he has gone too far: 'I have just spoken, he says, without my guide, and expounded ideas which, though connected with the subject I am treating, were perhaps not in Cuvier's wise mind'. And precisely because nothing is less like Cuvier's proceeding, it would have been in accordance with the simplest good taste, in a Eulogy of this latter, to refrain.

But I have dwelled enough upon the defects of a distinguished talent, whose Eulogies, whatever one may say of them, preserve some of their usefulness and even their charm. By collecting them with such care and accuracy in an edition both compact and elegant, M. Dubois (of Amiens) has done a service to literature, whilst he thought he was only fulfilling a duty towards his Company. He promises to collect in two early publications the Eulogies,

1 On Cuvier's Eulogies and those of the other Permanent Secretaries of the Academy of Sciences, one may read the first pages of a very good article by M. Biot in the *Journal des Savants* (November, 1842).

hitherto incomplete, of Vicq-d'Azyr, and those, almost all unpublished, of the celebrated Louis, Secretary of the old Academy of Surgery. Thus we should have an almost complete history of medicine and surgery in France during the second half of the last century. Since he succeeded M. Pariset in the office of Permanent Secretary, M. Dubois (of Amiens) has himself already delivered three Eulogies: that of Pariset, that of Broussais and that of the great surgeon Antoine Dubois. In this latter Eulogy, the conscientious talent with which the biographer has succeeded in rendering the character, not only of the master and the practitioner, but of the man, and the care and attention he has devoted to recomposing out of a mass of details an original figure, have above all been highly appreciated.

It is this sense of reality and truth which should be introduced more and more, though always with discretion and taste, into the historical Eulogy. I would like to see this accomplished, even in dealing with the men of Letters who are extolled in the circle of the Academies: with still more reason when men are concerned who have cultivated the sciences or the serious arts. The academic Notice, if well treated, with tact, sobriety and justness, is a delicate kind of composition, susceptible of charm, but of a light charm, and inconspicuous at a distance. For grandeur, provided that it enters naturally, there is room only on rare occasions. If these Notices were composed only to be read before colleagues and connoisseurs, men of the same profession, one might confine oneself to simple touches and remain in perfect harmony with the subject; but the public sittings bring with them the desire and need of applause, and applause is rarely won by delicate and correct touches, by well caught nuances, or even by simply elevated views. The danger at all times, ever since these Eulogies have been read in public, has lain in the orator seeking his success in ornaments foreign to the subject and in digressions on topics of the day. To cure himself of this tendency, it should suffice to read over those portions of the old Eulogies which were so applauded at the time: they are the portions which now form a blot.—Mlle. Mars uttered a word of great good sense, which has its application to more than one art: 'How much better we should act, if we were not so anxious to win

applause!' Take away this word *act*, which might appear unkind, is that not true of all those who have a part to play and are before the public, and who should appear to be there as little as possible, professors, public speakers, literary orators, and even savants? Not that I counsel the latter not to please, on the days when they appear in public; but they should try to please only whilst remaining themselves, and all art lies in moderation.[1]

[1] I am indebted to a fellow-townsman of Pariset, the Abbé Mourot, for a few particulars about his early years. He was born, on August 5, 1770, at Grand, a market-town in the arrondissement of Nantes; his father was a simple forest ranger. When eight years of age he was sent on a carrier's cart to an uncle in Nantes who was a wigmaker; there he attended the elementary school. At eleven he was apprenticed to a perfumer. Whilst crushing his cosmetics, the boy read and meditated; one day a Molière fell into his hands. A comrade lent him Massillon, Fénelon, Bousset, etc. The perfumer's shop was filled with books; a little of this perfumery always adhered to Pariset's writings. Seeing his inclination and passion for reading, he was sent to study with the Oratorians of the town. At the end of two years, he was first in the Rhétorique class, etc.

LETTERS OF THE MARQUISE DU DEFFAND

Monday, March 11, 1850.

MANY of the classics have been reprinted latterly, and even works which are not classics. The letters of Mme. Du Deffand, I know not why, have not had that honour. The most considerable collection of these letters was first published in London in 1810, from manuscripts found among the papers of Horace Walpole. This edition was reproduced at Paris in 1811, 1812, and 1824, with a few corrections and also some *suppressions*. No one has since taken the trouble to reprint the text after sifting it and comparing it with the London edition, in order to restore the several passages which were cut out or altered. And yet Mme. Du Deffand well deserved this attention, for she is one of our classics by her language and her thought, and one of the most excellent. It is this character that I would to-day try to determine in her.

I have spoken once in this place of Mme. de Sévigné, and quite recently of Mme. Sand. Between these two women so remote from each other and so different, what are the names that really count, that deserve to figure in the first line in the series of women celebrated by their talent as writers? Quite at Mme. de Sévigné's side, but with less imagination in style and less genius in detail, but with a poetic and romantic invention full of tenderness, and an incomparable lightness and correctness of expression, we find Mme. de La Fayette. Then we have Mme. de Maintenon, a well-balanced mind, a sound head, agreeable and perfect language within a restricted circle. At the other end of the chain we meet with Mme. de Staël. But between Mme. de Staël and Mme. de Maintenon, with a gap! We might still mention, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, that other Mme. de Staal

(Mlle. de Launay), the author of the charming *Memoirs*, a mind elevated and strong as well as delicate; but she did not live long enough, and, by the circumstances of her first condition in life, she never sufficiently mixed with the real centre of society, to personify it in our eyes at this distance. The whole of the eighteenth century, one might say, would fall short and possess as its literary representatives only women of unequal merit and a mixed taste, if it had not Mme. Du Deffand to offer us. By her origins this lady is connected with the epoch of Louis XIV, with that excellent language which issued from it. Born in 1697, and having died in 1780, she traversed almost the whole of the eighteenth century, the bold opinions of which she anticipated spontaneously whilst quite a child, and at no moment did she allow herself to be won by its infatuated doctrines, by its metaphysical or sentimental jargon. In prose she is with Voltaire the purest classic of this epoch, without even excepting any of the great writers.

Born of a noble family of Burgundy, Mlle. de Chamrond had received a very irregular, very incomplete education, and it was her mind alone that bore all the cost. It is related that in a convent of the Rue de Charonne where she was educated, she harboured doubts on matters of faith at an early age, and that she expressed herself about them rather freely. Her parents sent her no less a person than Massillon to bring her back to reason. The great preacher listened to her, and all that he said on leaving was: 'She is charming'. When the abbess urged him to tell her what book to give the child to read, Massillon replied after a moment's silence: 'Give her a five-sou catechism'. And they could get nothing more out of him. He seemed to despair of her from the first day. Mme. Du Deffand was at least peculiar among the free-thinkers of her century in that she did not boast of her opinions, that she was conscious that the philosophy one publishes abroad ceases to be a philosophy, and she was satisfied with remaining in perfect sincerity with herself. When Mlle. Aïssé on her death-bed asked for a confessor, it was Mme. Du Deffand who, with Mme. de Parabère, helped her to procure one.

Mme. Du Deffand often regretted not having had a different education, and cursed that which she had received:

'We sometimes ask ourselves, she said, whether we would like to return to such and such an age? Oh! I should not care to be young again, on condition of being educated as I was, of living only with the people with whom I lived, and of having the kind of intellect and character I have; I should have all the same misfortunes I have had: but I would consent with great pleasure to return to the age of four years, to have a Horace for my governor. . . .' And thereupon she outlined for herself quite an ideal plan of education under an enlightened, well-informed man like her friend Horace Walpole. The plan she imagined was serious and beautiful, but the education she gave herself, or rather which she owed only to nature and experience, made her a more original and unique person. We should not have known all that she was nor all that she was worth as intellect, as uprightness and light of judgment, if she had not drawn everything out of herself. At all times she was the person who least asked her neighbour what she ought to think.

They married her, according to the fine custom of the day, to a man who matched her only in respect of birth. She judged him at first glance, took a dislike to him, left him, tried for short periods to reconcile herself to him, and found the task too tiresome, and ended by frankly yielding to all the faults and inconsistencies which were calculated to injure her reputation, even in that world of relaxed and easy-going manners. In the flower of her beauty under the Regency, she breathed the spirit of that period; she was the mistress of the Regent and of many others. Proceeding from one disappointment to another, she always sought to repair her last mistake by some fresh experience. Later, in her old age, we see her, to the last, making as many new acquaintances as she can to fill up the voids or vary the tastes of the old ones: she must have done the same thing, to a still greater degree, in the matter of love during the first half of her life. However, after a certain moment we find her established on the somewhat honourable footing of a regular liaison with the President Hénault, a man of wit, but incomparably inferior to her. In the end she made the best of the match, as a sensible woman would have done in a marriage of reason. About this time (1740), Mme. Du Deffand has a salon which has become a centre;

she is intimate with all the illustrious men in Letters and the fashionable world. At all times friendly with Voltaire, she is the same with Montesquieu, with d'Alembert. She knows them and judges them in their person, in their character, more readily still than in their writings; she appraises their spirit at its source, without devotion to any, with independence. If she reads them, her judgment at once finds an outlet, and stops at no outside consideration. The smartest and justest things which are remembered about the celebrated men of her time came from her.

The distinctive feature of her mind was to grasp the truth, the reality of things and persons, without illusion of any kind. 'Is it not intolerable, she used to say of her factitious world, that one never hears the truth?' And as if she still sought something beyond, when she had discovered the reality, she was not satisfied, and disgust, weariness commenced. Ennui was her great terror, her dreaded enemy. An ardent nature under a cool exterior, she tried to repel this mortal ennui at any cost; she seemed to have within her some sort of instinct which vainly sought its object. One of the ladies of her society she appears to have esteemed most highly was the Duchesse de Choiseul, the wife of the minister of Louis XV, a good, virtuous woman, of regular conduct and charming at the same time, who had no other fault in her eyes except that she was too perfect; she wrote to her one day: 'So you feel no ennui, dear grandmamma (this was a society sobriquet she gave her), and I believe it since you say so. *Your life is not occupied, but it is filled.* Permit me to say what I think, which is that if it were not occupied, it would not be filled. You have much experience; but you lack one which, I hope, you will never have: that is the *deprivation of sentiment, with the grief of not being able to do without it*'. Here we touch the deeply painful spot of this nature which was thought to be cold and was not so. It is by this feeling of both impotence and desire that Mme. Du Deffand forms, in some sort, the link between the eighteenth century and ours. Mme. de Maintenon also suffered from ennui, but it was not in the same way; with her it was more reasonable. If I did not fear to commit an anachronism of language, I do not think I should be committing one in a moral sense, if I said that

there was already in Mme. Du Deffand something of *Lélia*, but Lélia without any phrase-mongering.

She sought, then, around her that resource which a woman very rarely finds in herself and herself alone. She sought *another*, or rather she no longer sought him. She would have vainly expected to find him in a society where her inexorable glance saw little more than a collection of absurdities, pretensions and follies. The men of Letters of her time, when their names were Voltaire, Montesquieu or d'Alembert, amused her well enough, but not one of them was able to fully satisfy her; their atoms and hers had never become more than half united. She had felt a strong intellectual attraction to the amiable Mme. de Staal (de Launay) whom she soon lost. She had, however, a real friend, Formont; a friend of habit, the President Hénault, and enough worldly intimacies to fill any other existence that was less exacting; but taking them altogether they only sufficed to divert hers. During a visit she made for her health to the waters at Forges in the summer of 1742, she wrote several letters to the President Hénault and received a good number from him. This correspondence exists and is curious in its tone. Mme. Du Deffand has no sooner arrived there when she expects letters from the President with an impatience which is inconceivable, and she sets forth the proofs of her liking for him, lest he should be ignorant of them: 'It has grieved me to find that I am so susceptible to ennui as I have been lately; I have come to see that the life I lead in Paris is more agreeable than I could have believed, and that I should be infinitely unhappy if I had to give it up. You may conclude from this that you are as necessary to me as my own existence, since, any day, I would rather be with you than with any of the people I see: this is not a compliment I wish to pay you, it is a geometrical demonstration I want to give you'. To these pretty arguments the President replies with gallantries in his own fashion, which are not always very delicate. He tells her news of the Court and his own suppers: 'Our supper was excellent, and, what will surprise you, we enjoyed ourselves. I confess that on leaving I should have visited you, if I had known where to find you; the weather was most beautiful, the moon was lovely. . . .' We may

imagine that Mme. Du Deffand twits him with this *moon*; she reduces this flash of sentiment to its just value, and, whilst trying to say a few pleasant words to him, she delivers the key to her own physical and moral nature. I will here dilute her confession a little, and translate it: physically indifference, morally no romance.[1]

Add to this a consuming activity which was unable to impose upon itself, and you will begin to understand her.

Such she was at the age when the last rays of youth expire. It was about ten years after this that she first felt her sight gradually becoming weaker, and foresaw a near future of horrible blindness. Haunted by this idea of solitude and eternal ennui, she tried to find a companion in Mlle. de Lespinasse. The story is well known: after a few years the young lady-companion quarrelled with her mistress, and carried away a large part of her society, with d'Alembert at their head. This defection caused a sensation, and split society into two camps. People took sides with or against Mlle. de Lespinasse; generally speaking the younger men, the men of Letters and the Encyclopedists en masse were on her side. All that we can say is, that harmony could not subsist between these two women, though each had made many concessions. They had, both of them, too much spirit, a too exacting spirit, and the generations they belonged to were too different. Mme. Du Deffand represented the time before Jean-Jacques, before the romantic exaltation; her maxim was that 'the note of romance is to passion what copper is to gold'. And Mlle. de Lespinasse was of that second half of the century into which romance entered irresistibly. The separation was bound to come sooner or later.

Mme. Du Deffand was at this pass, blind, having apartments in the convent of Saint-Joseph, Rue Saint-Dominique (a few rooms of the apartment once occupied by Mme. de Montespan, the founder); she was sixty-eight years of age; she lived in the highest society, as if she were not afflicted with the saddest infirmity, forgetting it as best she could, and trying by her cleverness and pleasant manners to make others forget it; rising late, turning night into day; entertaining at home and going

[1] I will be bolder in a note; she said quite frankly: '*Ni tempérament, ni roman*'.

out to supper, having among her intimates the President Hénault, Pont-de-Veyle, the world of the Choiseuls with whom she was related, the wives of the Maréchal de Luxembourg and the Maréchal de Mirepoix, and others whom she cared for more or less, when there arrived in Paris from England, in the autumn of 1765, an Englishman, one of the most distinguished for wit, Horace Walpole: that was the great literary and romantic (that is the word for the nonce) event of Mme. Du Deffand's life, to which we owe her principal Correspondence and all that best enables us to understand her. This elderly blind lady was instantly enamoured of the lively, bold, delicate and coloured wit of Horace Walpole, who was not cut after the pattern of any of those whom she had seen during the previous fifty years. She immediately perceived in him both the qualities peculiar to this so distinguished man and those of the strong race to which he belonged: and she was equally grateful for both; and she who had never loved with love, who had had only fancies and no romance, who, in the matter of friendships, had hitherto counted only three serious ones in her life, that of Formont and of two women, one of whom had deceived her; this moralist with a satiric humour became suddenly tender, moved as well as amused, of an active, passionate solicitude; she was no longer herself. In brief, blind and sixty-eight years of age, she found a place for her heart, and this time (for the rarity of the case) she fixed it upon an Englishman, a man much sought after, with an extensive acquaintance, who was not yet fifty years of age, young enough to be her son, who was destined to spend his life away from her, and whom she greatly embarrassed by her vivacious tenderness. So true it is that she was fated, as somebody has said, to be ever wise in judgment, and ever to commit follies in conduct.

But to us it does not appear in the light of a folly: for it is the fine side of Mme. Du Deffand, that which raises her, which shows us that, though she had hitherto been sparing of her sensibility, she was not destitute of it, that she was capable even of passion. In short, if we pardon Mme. de Sévigné for having madly loved her daughter, we must pardon Mme. Du Deffand for having had for Walpole that passion which one knows not how to qualify,

which had entered her heart through her mind, but which was fervent, elevated and pure.

The first time Horace Walpole saw her in Paris, he wrote of her to one of his friends (October 6, 1765). After a few details on his own variations of impressions and humour since his arrival, he added:

'At present I begin, very Englishly indeed, to establish a right to my own way. I laugh, and talk nonsense, and make them hear me. There are two or three houses where I go quite at my ease, am never asked to touch a card, nor hold dissertations. Nay, I don't pay homage to their authors. Every woman has one or two planted in her house, and God knows how they water them. The old Président Hénault is the pagod at Madame Du Deffand's, an old blind débauchée of wit, where I supped last night. The President is very near deaf, and much nearer superannuated'.

When writing this, he did not yet suspect that the lady he called a *débauchée of wit* was going to be seized with a veritable intellectual passion for him, and that this passion in her would turn to a passion of the heart, the only one perhaps she had had, and which lasted for fifteen years, as strong on the last day as on the first.

I have just looked rather closely into this relationship between Walpole and Mme. Du Deffand, and I am of opinion that generally one is not just to either. On Walpole's part one professes to see hardly more than the fear he had, in the mocking world of that day, of incurring ridicule from that passion so openly displayed by the blind old lady: and as for Mme. Du Deffand, we judge her too much as she was judged by Grimm, Marmontel, the Encyclopedic coterie, through whom the tradition has come down to us. We judge her too much, in a word, as if we were on the side of her enemy, Mlle. de Lespinasse, or on that of Mme. Geoffrin. The serious, profound, true judgment on Mme. Du Deffand is to be sought in Walpole's *Letters*; for Walpole, in spite of his more apparent than real harshness, appreciated his old friend at her full value and admired her extremely. He returned several times to Paris expressly for her sake. In a letter to the poet Gray, which he wrote three months after that just quoted (January, 1766), he gives a delightful sketch of the two rival figures, Mme. Geoffrin and Mme. Du Deffand:

'Her great enemy, Madame du Deffand, was for a short time mistress of the Regent, is now very old and stone-blind, but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, passions and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, and Versailles; gives suppers twice a week; has everything new read to her; makes new songs and epigrams, ay, admirably, and remembers every one that has been made these fourscore years.[1] She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, contradicts him, is no bigot to him or anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers. In a dispute, into which she easily falls, she is very warm, and yet scarce ever in the wrong: her judgment on every subject is as just as possible; on every point of conduct as wrong as possible: for she is all love and hatred, passionate for her friends to enthusiasm, still anxious to be loved, I don't mean by lovers, and a vehement enemy, but openly'.

In this first portrait to which Walpole added several more touches of his brush, we may already see a much more sprightly and animated Mme. Du Deffand than the one usually depicted.

Walpole quits Paris on April 17, 1766, after a stay of seven months, and Mme. Du Deffand already writes to him on the 10th. It is true that she had already received a letter from him the day before, and this letter was intended especially to recommend her to secrecy and discretion. What was the good, one may say, of so much prudence? It must be remembered that there existed at that time a black cabinet; letters were unsealed, and a too tender, too ardent letter from a woman of seventy, might, if divulged, reach the King, the Court, might amuse the courtiers, might offer a theme for the composition, on this rather singular intercourse, of some of those satiric couplets which Mme. Du Deffand herself could write so well. Walpole would not have cared to put up with that. Mme. Du Deffand was more inured: 'They have been laughing at us, you say; but here they laugh at everything, and they forget it the next moment'. This fear on Walpole's part continually returns; he

1 A couplet of hers is quoted, which she wrote on her friend the Duc de Choiseul. She had once composed a parody on the tragedy of *Inès de Castro* to the tune of *Mirliton*. When Mme. de Prye and she were young, they discovered a pleasant means of killing ennui, by sending each other a satiric verse every morning, composed by each against the other. We must not forget that Mme. Du Deffand was of Burgundy; she seems to have inherited the local verve, which inspired Piron and La Monnoye with so many piquant *noëls*.

moderates as best he can his old friend's ardour; he rallies her on being *romantic, sentimental*; he provokes her by taxing her with metaphysics, a thing she abhors most. She answers him with anger, with submission, with feeling. Again and again she ingeniously returns to the forbidden topic, to that constant thought of which he alone is the object. If he is ill, if he does not write often enough, she playfully threatens him with the most violent extremes:

'Mark well, she says, that I do not ask for letters, but simple bulletins: if you refuse me that indulgence, I shall straightway say to Viart (*her secretary*): Away, take your boots, fly with all speed to London, publish in every street that you have come in my name, that you have orders to reside near Horace Walpole, that he is my guardian, that I am his ward, that I have an unbridled passion for him, and that I shall perhaps immediately arrive myself; that I shall settle on Strawberry Hill, and that there is no scandal I am not ready to give rise to.

'Ah! my guardian, quick, take a smelling-bottle, you are going to faint; yet that is what will happen to you, if I do not hear from you twice a week'.

Here she is jesting. At other times she is sad, bitter, and takes a despairing view of life:

'Ah! mon Dieu! how right you are! what an abominable, detestable thing is friendship! where does it come from? what does it lead to? on what is it founded? what good can one expect or hope from it? What you tell me is true; but why are we on earth, and above all why does one grow old? . . . Last evening I admired the large company at my house; men and women appeared to me like clockwork-machines which went, came, spoke, laughed, without thinking, without reflecting, without feeling; each played his part from habit: the Duchesse d'Aiguillon was bursting with laughter, Mme. de Forcalquier disdained everything; Mme. de La Vallière chattered about everything. The men played parts that were no better, and I was plunged in the blackest reflections: I thought that I had passed my life in illusions; that I had myself dug all the pits I had fallen into; that all my judgments had been wrong and foolhardy, and always too hasty, and that, in short, I had not known anybody perfectly; that I had not been known by them either, and that perhaps I did not know myself. One desires a support, one lets oneself be charmed by the hope that one has found it; it is a dream that is dispelled by circumstances, and on which they have the effect of an awakening'.

We have the two notes. The latter note, that is to say the penetrating and serious accent, which goes to the bottom of everything, is not uncommon in these Letters of Mme. Du Deffand. Walpole, like the real Englishman he is, in spite of his flashes of wit *à la française*, makes her read Shakespeare; she enjoyed him at once, she rejoiced as at the discovery of a new world: 'Oh! I admire your Shakespeare. I read *Othello* yesterday, I have just read *Henry VI*; I cannot express to you the effect these plays have had upon me, they have given me new life'. She too, in her own way, sees to the bottom of things, like Shakespeare, and her 64th Letter is what I call her Hamlet's monologue. I advise the curious to read the passage beginning with the words: 'Dites-moi pourquoi, détestant la vie, je redoute la mort . . .' and ending with the words: 'J'avoue qu'un rêve vaudrait mieux'. An English critic, at the time the Letters appeared in London, remarked justly that Mme. Du Deffand seems to have combined in the cast of her mind some of the qualities of the two nations, the light and agreeable turn of the one with the boldness and the robust judgment of the other.

What she had at the very beginning liked in Walpole was his freedom of thought and judgment. She loved the true before everything, and she wanted every man to be his real self. The taste of the day disgusted her: 'What they nowadays call eloquence has become so hateful to me, that I should prefer the language of the market halls; in one's efforts to find wit, one stifles it'. Her literary judgments, which must have appeared excessively severe at the time, are almost all confirmed to-day: 'This Saint-Lambert, she says, is a cold, insipid, false mind; he thinks he is brimming with ideas, and he is sterility itself'. What she here says of Saint-Lambert she said, saving variants, of many others. How she discriminated in Voltaire! how she distinguishes in him the good through the mediocre, what is fresh from the source from mere tautology! She does the same in the case of Jean-Jacques: 'Not knowing what to read, I have picked up Rousseau's *Héloïse*; there are some very good passages, but they are drowned in an ocean of long-winded eloquence'. On Racine, on Corneille, she has sound and correct judgments. There is only one work

she would like to have written, only one, because it appears to her to have attained perfection in every respect, and that work is *Athalie*. It has been said of her that in the matter of reading, *she had never denied herself anything but the necessary*. That is a witty but careless statement. No doubt she had not had a foundation of regular, systematic reading. As she had not been told in time what she ought to admire, she only had her own clear opinion, her free and luminous instinct; it was ordinarily a good guide.

'You English, she said to Walpole, submit to no rule, no method; you allow genius to grow without forcing it to take such or such a shape; you would still have all the wit you have, if none had had any before you. Oh! we are not like that; we have books; some are *the art of thinking*; others the *art of speaking, of writing, of composing, of judging*, etc.'

But if she appears to be here flattering Walpole and espousing the taste of his nation, she does not always compliment him, and can oppose him on occasion. She holds fast to Montaigne, whom he did not like; she is astonished at this; and gives her reasons in many a passage:

'I am very sure that you will come to like Montaigne; one finds in him everything one has ever thought, and no style is so energetic; he teaches nothing, because he comes to no decision; that is the opposite of dogmatism: he is vain—eh! are not all men vain? and are not those who appear modest doubly vain? The *I* and *me* are in every line; but what knowledge can we have except through the *I* and the *me*? Come, come, my guardian, he is the only good philosopher and the only good metaphysician that ever was'.

And in another charming passage where she compares him with Walpole in his manor on Strawberry Hill, she concludes: 'Come, come, Horace is more like Michel than he thinks'. What she also loves in Montaigne, is that he had a friend and believed in friendship. So this lady, an unbeliever in everything, had come in her old age to believe in something, and for that much will be pardoned her.

Mme. de Sévigné was at that time very much in vogue in society; people read a recently published collection of her Letters; they lent each other unpublished letters

on the Fouquet trial. Horace Walpole doted on her and always called her *Notre-Dame-de-Livry*. Oh! how often Mme. Du Deffand, to please him, envied the style of that *saint of Livry*! 'But do not imitate her on any account! Walpole said to her, your style is your own, as hers belongs to her'. Mme. de Sévigné, by the way, is perfectly judged by Mme. Du Deffand, as is her cousin Bussy. Mme. de Maintenon is likewise caught to the life: 'I persist in believing that that woman was not insincere, but she was dry, austere, unfeeling, passionless . . .' This portrait of Mme. de Maintenon should be read in full in Mme. Du Deffand, and remains the most like her of all that have ever been drawn. We might be tempted even to apply it partly to herself in the conclusions, if Mme. Du Deffand, in loving Walpole, had not belied by this unexpected rejuvenescence her old reputation for coldness.

Walpole was a virtuoso, an amateur, an antiquary, a book-lover, having all sorts of tastes and perhaps even a few manias. Mme. Du Deffand envied him because he never suffered ennui when alone; but, with her severe taste, she did not understand how one could like so many things pell-mell, how one could read both Shakespeare and Voltaire's *War of Geneva*, admire Mme. de Sévigné and take a pleasure in the novels of a Crébillon *fils*. She told him so. In the matter of history, however, and memoirs, she congratulated herself on having an agreement of taste with him. I may be permitted to quote this passage, because Mme. Du Deffand has been reproached with not liking Plutarch, and because I am sure that, if she did not like him, it was because she had discovered him to be a little declamatory:

'I like proper names too, she said; I can only read of things written by those to whom they have occurred, or who have witnessed them; I prefer besides that they be written without phrases, without affectation, without reflexion; that the author should not trouble himself about fine writing; in short, I prefer the tone of conversation, of animation, of warmth, and, above all, of ease and simplicity. Where do we find that? In a few books one knows by heart, and which are assuredly not limited at the present day'.

That sufficiently indicates the classical side, as I call it, in Mme. Du Deffand, in the higher sense of the word,

that by which she is outside of and above her age. I will not here dwell upon the portraits which she drew of the persons of her society. She excelled in the *portrait* and fixed the absurdities and follies of their subjects in a graphic, ineffaceable manner. She habitually saw in their different deportments only varieties of the universal folly. Seated in her arm-chair, blind as she was, she saw everything; she perpetually uses this word *see*; she forgets that she has no sight, and others forget it when listening to her. She even criticized the playing of actors and actresses, and it was she who stamped with a word the character of Mlle. Raucourt at her début: '*She is a demoniac without warmth*'.

I have said that Horace Walpole returned from England several times to see her. It is curious to gather the impression of that witty and clear-sighted friend: he rises in our opinion and wins absolution for any little words of harshness and coolness to her by the way he speaks of her to others. He did not blush, I assure you, to speak of his *dear old friend*. At every visit he finds her grown younger as it were, and he is not without his share in bringing about the miracle. In a letter dated September 7, 1769, he writes:

'Feeling in herself no difference between the spirits of twenty-three and seventy-three, she thinks there is no impediment to doing whatever one wills, but the want of eyesight. . . . She makes songs, sings them, remembers all that ever were made; and, having lived from the most agreeable to the most reasoning age, has all that was amiable in the last, all that is sensible in this, without the vanity of the former, or the pedant impertinence of the latter. I have heard her dispute with all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, and never knew her in the wrong. She humbles the learned, sets right their disciples, and finds conversation for everybody. Affectionate as Mme. de Sévigné (what praise in Walpole's mouth!), she has none of her prejudices, but a more universal taste; and, with the most delicate frame her spirits hurry her through a life of fatigue that would kill me, if I was to continue here. If we return by one in the morning from suppers in the country, she proposes driving to the Boulevard or the Foire St. Ovide, because it is *too early* to go to bed. I had great difficulty last night to persuade her, though she was not well, not to sit up till two or three for the comet; for which purpose she had appointed an astronomer to bring his telescopes to the President Hénault's, as she thought it would amuse me'.

Poor President Hénault, we see, was not dead; but for some years he had been little more than dead, and was but a wreck. To the end of her life Mme. Du Deffand was always the same, lively, indefatigable, of a *herculean weakness*, as Walpole put it. She did not sleep: she needed more than ever to spend her nights in society: 'Though it should injure my health, she said, even if it does not suit the habits of those I love to live with, *I shall go to bed at midnight if necessary*'. Like the old Venceslas, she wanted to go to sleep as late as possible:

> Ce que j'ôte à mes nuits, je l'ajoute à mes jours.

In one of his journeys to Paris (August, 1775), Walpole, whilst unbooting, sees Mme. Du Deffand arrive at his hotel; she assists at his toilette, wherein there is no impropriety, she remarks, since she can see nothing. Walpole is to sup with her and leaves her at half-past two in the night, and next morning, before he is quite awake, he already had a letter from her to read. 'In short, he said, her soul is immortal, and forces her body to bear it company'.

There are two traditions on Mme. Du Deffand: the purely French tradition which has come to us through those she had criticized so severely, the men of Letters and the Encyclopedists; there is another tradition, the direct and more true, more intimate tradition, and we must go to Walpole to draw it at the source. There we find to our surprise an ardent, passionate woman, full of devotion, and good even. 'Ah! mon Dieu! what a great and estimable virtue is goodness! she exclaims in one place. Every day I make a resolution to be good, and I know not if I make any progress. . . .' Contrast with this one of those terrible things she sometimes gives utterance to, in the manner of La Rochefoucauld: 'There is not a single person to whom one may confide one's troubles without giving him a malicious joy, and humiliating oneself in his eyes'. Well! the two traditions, that which makes her unfeeling, and that which shows her passionate, should be combined to give a complete view. But the deep key to this heart is in her feeling for Walpole. In one place Mme. Du Deffand regrets that Walpole was not her *son*, which would have been possible strictly speaking from the point of view of their ages. And, indeed

we may see in this sudden passion of a sterile old age a kind of maternal tenderness which has never had its object, and which suddenly awakens without knowing its true name. To avoid offence, and to comprehend the secret instinct, we may call it a tenderness of adoption. She loves Walpole as the tenderest of mothers might have loved a long-lost and suddenly recovered son. Many of these singular and fantastic passions, in which sensibility is carried too far, are often only the revenge of nature, punishing us for not having done simple things in their proper season.

I will say nothing of Mme. Du Deffand's letters from the historical point of view, and of the curious light they throw upon the end of Louis XV, and the first years of Louis XVI. I will say nothing even of the spirit and tone of her society, which was rather faithfully perpetuated after her in the circle of the Beauvau family, and even in the salon of the Princesse de Poix under the Empire. I will only recall one thing, that so restrained and so touching last letter she dictated for Walpole. The faithful secretary Viart, who had just written it, could not read it through to his mistress without sobbing; she then uttered those words, so profoundly sad in their naïve astonishment: '*You love me then?*' There we have the torment of her whole life, incredulity and desire. She had given directions that her dog *Tonton* should be sent to Walpole to take charge of after her death. The trusty Viart, in the letter in which he relates to Walpole the details of this illness and death, adds at the end: 'I will keep *Tonton* until the departure of M. Thomas Walpole; I take the greatest care of him. He is very gentle; he was only vicious when beside his mistress'. Now, in a letter of Walpole dated May 4, 1781, I read these words: 'My poor dear Madame Du Deffand's little dog is arrived. She made me promise to take care of it the last time I saw her: that I will most religiously, and make it as happy as possible'. I did not want to do like Buffon, and forget the dog of the blind.

M. DE CHATEAUBRIAND[1]

Monday, March 18, 1850.

EIGHT volumes are already collected. Although the publication of the last parts still continues in feuilletons, it may be said that these *Memoirs* have been judged in their first form, and that the public have formed their opinion; but as a complete work they are not yet definitely judged.

I have no pretensions to speak in that capacity here, nor of assuming the airs of a judge delivering final judgment. Such an office would become me less than anybody, having been one of the first to announce these *Memoirs* whilst still in a state of confidential communication. It is true that when, in April, 1834, I gave such favourable glimpses of them, I spoke only of what I knew and of what was finished at the time; but we were already able to form an idea of the work as a whole. I would rather admit that, in the flattering frame and under the enchanted half-light in which these budding pages were then gradually being unveiled to us, our impressions, mine as well as those of many others, were to a certain extent commanded and softened by an amiable influence, which we were not in the habit of resisting. Mme. Récamier entreated us to be gracious, and in asking you to do a thing she lent you some of her grace. But to-day, after fully sixteen years have passed, when we read again the work printed in all its connexion, after putting aside every flattering recollection and questioning ourselves in all freedom, what do we think?

What do I think? Last year, during a visit I paid to a hospitable country outside the borders of France, I deliberately put this question to myself in respect, not

[1] *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, by M. de Chateaubriand.

of the *Memoirs* alone, but of M. de Chateaubriand himself. Being bound towards his high renown by no other feeling but that of a respect and admiration which a free investigation has the right to mete out, I studied the man and the writer in detail, with deliberation, and the result was quite a book which I should already have prepared for publication, but for the fact that I too frequently chat in this paper. I will confine myself at present to giving my final impression of the *Memoirs*.

The truth is that they have had very little success, as little as can be, and that they have caused an immense disappointment. They had been so much spoken of in advance, the charming parts had been so much praised, the defects, the disagreeable asperities so much veiled, that the public knew the former and were only the more violently offended by the latter. This piece-meal publication, falling right into the street corners on the morrow of a revolution, and in conditions so different from those in which it had been long and mysteriously preparating, soon came to compete with another publication of the same nature, the *Confidences* of M. de Lamartine, of which the qualities, the defects even had the seduction of a younger, fresher, and always easy and flowing manner. And then, if we go to the root of the matter, the public have not been mistaken on a capital point: they have not, I think, been sufficiently impressed by the talent, but throughout this narrative, in which so many tones cross and clash, they have become aware of a stubborn personality, a persistent and harsh vanity, which in time becomes almost a habit. If there are vanities which one excuses and which find pardon on account of their kindly and natural air, this one was too wanting in indulgence and too acute to be unconsciously pardoned; and as, in this sort of works it is the character and person one judges rather than the talent of the artist, the public received on the whole a disagreeable impression; without discriminating very nicely between the character and the talent, after a few weeks of hesitation and struggle, they have said of these *Memoirs* en masse: 'I do not like them'.

They are not very amiable in fact, and there lies the great fault. For with regard to the talent, in the midst of veins of bad taste and mistakes of every kind, such as we find indeed in almost all M. de Chateaubriand's

writings, one feels on many pages the stroke of the master, the claw of the old lion, sudden elevations side by side with strange puerilities, and passages of a grace, a magic suavity, in which we recognize the touch and accent of the wizard.

Let us figure to ourselves M. de Chateaubriand at his débuts, before that kind of classical renown which the age has given him. Have you recently read again the *Essai sur les Révolutions* and *Les Natchez*, those works of his youth which reveal him to us as he was until the age of nearly thirty ? Have you ever read the *first* edition of *Atala*, the *first* edition even of the *Génie du Christianisme* ? There we had a primitive Chateaubriand, and, in my opinion, the most real Chateaubriand in sentiment as well as in style, a Chateaubriand before he came under the influence of Fontanes, who presents, however, together with unique beauties, the strangest incongruities and a luxuriance of sap, an extravagance of growth which one is at a loss how to qualify. There, however, was the primary stock from which everything else sprang ; the quite novel matter out of which, with time and art, he formed his glory. Nature had made him thus, and, regarded from certain essential sides, he resembled none of the writers who had preceded him. In every art it is much less important, at the beginning, to do better than others, than to do it differently, provided that this *differently* be not a pretension, but a gift of nature. M. de Chateaubriand had received this rarest of gifts. But when he first came to Paris, from 1788 to 1791, that is at the age of from twenty to twenty-three years, he had not yet clearly revealed it in himself, and he was in danger of entering the domain of Letters through imitation. He would have required time and many efforts afterwards to throw it off. The Revolution saved him : in casting him beyond the seas and into the diversity of exiles, it permitted him to grow up spontaneously, to develop by his own resources, to listen to the unknown muse in solitude, to know himself and to be directly tempered by trials ? An emigrant in London at the age of twenty-six, he wrote that fantastic *Essai sur les Révolutions*, more fantastic in form than in ideas, in which the whole man already outlined himself. This primitive man may afterwards have concealed himself in M. de Chateaubriand,

but he persisted under every helmet and every mask; in every part he played since, even the most serious, this primitive man was always obtruding himself, raising his visor and saying: 'I am underneath, behold me!' The man of the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* is extraordinarily like the man of the *Essai*, but he resembles him with this difference that, in the interval, more than one official personage has been created in him, has been added as it were to his nature, and that even whilst at times shaking off these more or less factitious parts, and appearing to hold them cheap, the author of the *Memoirs* never completely throws them off. It is in this inextricable struggle between the natural man and the solemn personages, in this conflict of the two or three natures which are complicated in him, that we must seek in great part the want of harmonious impression and of the power to please in this motley work, on which talent, however, has set its mark.

In the matter of style, M. de Chateaubriand, like all the great artists, had several manners. One is pretty generally agreed in placing the perfection of his literary manner in the period of the *Martyrs* and the *Itinéraire* (1809–1811), and the perfection of his political manner in the epoch of his controversy with M. de Villèle in the *Journal des Débats* (1824–1827): but, whilst adhering to this just view, we must not forget through how many confidential judgments, how many revisions and successive refining processes the *Martyrs* had to pass to reach that purity of form which we see in the work. Nor must we forget that as in his literary period M. de Chateaubriand had in Fontanes an assiduous and faithful counsellor, so for his political controversy in the *Débats* he found a friend, a man of taste, and equally severe, in M. Bertin the elder, who took the liberty of cutting out of every article what he did not consider good, without the author (a rare thing) ever complaining or even inquiring about it. For, let us say it to his praise, M. de Chateaubriand, with that facility which belongs to a strong and fertile nature ever ready to relapse, did not cling to his phrases when a sure friend pointed out their faults. So, for his articles in the *Débats*, the fine things remained, and the bad vanished by a stroke of the pen. But if we take other writings of M. de Chateaubriand, belonging to a date very near to

that which is reputed his best period, for example the *Mémoires sur le Duc de Berry*, or the *Études historiques*, we find in them every imaginable fault of proportion and taste: the reason being that his Aristarchus failed him. This means that at no time was M. de Chateaubriand's taste very ripe and quite sure, although at one time, to judge by some of his writings, it appeared so. It is not at all astonishing then to find, in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, those first faults which were in him and to which he was fated to return still more frequently as he advanced in years.

The first part of the *Memoirs*, that part which presents a picture of the days of his childhood and adolescence, belongs, however, by the date of its composition, to the happiest epoch of M. de Chateaubriand's maturity, to that year 1811 in which he published the *Itinéraire*. So this part is by far the lightest in touch and the purest, and I venture to say that it would appear still more so if he had not frequently overloaded it as he grew older. From about 1837 his hand was spoiled; the strokes of his brush became thicker and more broken in their final energy. His style still reflected lights and emanated perfumes which he had caught from Greece, but the old Celt also reappeared more frequently; and, to mention here a writer whom he sometimes quotes and who was the expression of an extreme of studied elegance in an extreme decadence, one might say that in the last parts of his composition he borrowed something of the style of Sidonius Apollinaris, so subtle and laboured does the work seem! One might assert, at a mere glance, that certain pages which bear the date 1822, had received a stratum of 1837.

But it is the moral impression which, in the public judgment, gets much the better of the effect of style. I will mention at once one of the most serious improprieties, which the author himself felt. 'If I were still master of these *Memoirs*, he writes in the preface, either I would keep them in manuscript, or I would hold back their publication for fifty years'. In placing himself under an obligation, in fact, to have these *Memoirs* published on the morrow of his death, in which so many living persons are criticized, and that generally without any lenity, whilst always giving himself the fine rôle, M. de Chateaubriand exposed himself to severe reprisals. Passionate

and vindictive in politics, he said too much of some, too little of others. In their political parts his *Memoirs* did not take time to calm down, to sleep off their rancour, so to say, and to await at least, before appearing, the perfect lukewarmness of the future: they have preserved the anger and heat of the pamphlet. There is a certain honourable and estimable man who may have had his faults in politics (and who has not had them, in one form or another ?), there is a man, I say, venerable by his virtues, who finds himself treated in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* with indignity and contempt. One wonders, in reading these passages, by what right a man who was alive yesterday, and who would not have spoken thus to a man's face, took upon himself to discharge these shafts to-day, solely because he has sheltered himself behind a tomb. But this reproach is addressed especially to the political part, and for the present I have in view rather the literary portion, that which extends to the year 1814.

The men of Letters are not, in general, treated any better than are the politicians in the second part, but the former at least are dead, and it only remains to examine if the sentence is just. On Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, for example, we read: 'A man whose brush I admired and still admire, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, was lacking in intellect, and unfortunately his character was on a level with his mind. How many pictures are spoiled in the *Études de la Nature* by the narrowness of his intelligence and the want of elevation of soul in the writer!' Whilst granting whatever one pleases with regard to Bernardin's want of character, it is wholly unjust and false to say that that writer lacked *elevation of soul*. His pictures, on the contrary, testify on every page to that natural elevation which the writer resumed whenever he entered upon his contemplative and solitary instincts. Rousseau has been no better treated in many a passage we might quote. In a chapter entitled *Des Gens de Lettres en 89*, we find portraits of Ginguené and Chamfort which are so satiric and so sharply outlined, that if they are not contradicted in time, they stand a chance of living and carrying their victims in that form down to posterity. But these portraits are false and in part calumnious. To prove it, it would be sufficient to confront M. de Chateaubriand with his own reminiscences and testimonies, which he has

recorded in the book of the *Essai*, published in 1797. At that date Chamfort was already dead; the author of the *Essai* speaks of him with the most present memories and in an almost affectionate tone: 'I often saw him, he says, at M. Ginguené's, and more than once he helped me to spend *happy moments*, when he *consented*, with a little select company, to accept a supper in my family. We would listen to him with that *respectful pleasure* which one feels when hearing a superior man of Letters'. And after a portrait of the physical and moral man, drawn very much to the life: 'His voice was flexible, he added, his modulations followed the movements of his soul; but during the last periods of my stay in Paris, it had taken on some asperity, and one discerned in it the agitated and imperious note of factions. *I have always been astonished that a man who had so much knowledge of men could so warmly espouse any cause whatever*'. This last admission is valuable for us, and in the *Memoirs* we continually come across that same indifference which was sincere in the *Essai*, but which, in the *Memoirs*, is rather a pretence of indifference: 'As a last result, *everything being indifferent to me*, I did not insist, he says somewhere. In politics, the warmth of my opinions has never exceeded the length of my speeches or of my pamphlets'. But then, if everything is indifferent to you, why *espouse so warmly any cause whatever*? Here we touch upon those contradictions I have spoken of, which contribute much to the discordant effect of the *Memoirs*.

I come back to the various literary judgments we there meet with. If M. de Chateaubriand does not treat his poetic parents, Jean-Jacques and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, very well, he has not much more indulgence for his own posterity, for his own children in literature. One should see how he sneers at those young innovators to whom he communicated, as he says, the malady from which he suffered. 'In vain I cried out in terror to my children: '*Do not forget your French*!'" And now he caricatures his unfortunate children. He cannot find enough mockery for the brood of Renés who issued from him; he went so far as to say: 'If *René* did not exist, I would not write it again; if it were possible to destroy it, I would destroy it. A family of poetic Renés and prose Renés has overrun the world; we have heard nothing but mourn-

ful and disconnected phrases. . . .' Evidently René did not desire any children, and if it had been possible, he would like not to have had any father (in literature).

On the subject of Byron, on the subject of Mme. de Staël, M. de Chateaubriand brings into his *Memoirs* some singular and doubtful assertions, attended by continual lapses of memory. He makes it a reproach to Byron that he imitated him without any acknowledgment, and without giving him the credit; he adds that, in his own youth, Goethe's *Werther*, Rousseau's *Reveries*, may have stood in the relation of parents to his ideas: but I, he says, 'have concealed nothing, have disguised none of the pleasure I found in works which delighted me'. Here he forgets what he did himself; for, far from admitting that those men of genius were akin to himself, he on the contrary denied them to the best of his ability, and in the *Defence* he once set up of the *Génie du Christianisme* and of *René*, he wrote: 'It was Jean-Jacques who first introduced among us those so disastrous and blameworthy reveries . . . the romance of *Werther*, has since developed this poison-germ. The author of the *Génie du Christianisme*, being obliged to insert into the frame of his apology a few pictures for the imagination, wished to denounce that kind of new vice, and paint the baneful consequences of an exaggerated love of solitude'. In this singular fashion did he do homage to his parents and forerunners; but, in order to have the right of complaining of Lord Byron, he completely forgot it.

These lapses of memory are perpetually recurring in the *Memoirs*, and they always turn to the advantage of the author's vanity. But, in the case of Mme. de Staël, forgetfulness is carried to a degree that is almost incredible, and passes all bounds. It must be remembered that Mme. de Staël published, in 1800, a work on *Literature considered in its relations to Society*. In this book she did not mention M. de Chateaubriand, for the very simple reason that M. de Chateaubriand was then completely unknown, and that he had published nothing in France at that date, *Atala* not appearing till 1801, and the *Génie du Christianisme* in 1802. Now, M. de Chateaubriand, still unknown, made his first entry into literature by the insertion of an article in the *Mercure* in the form of a letter, and it was precisely this book of Mme. de Staël

which he attacked in this letter. Well! the author of the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* so completely forgot that fact, that, in the chapter in which he accuses Byron of never having mentioned him, he adds: 'No intelligence, however favoured it may be, but has its susceptibilities, its distrusts: one wishes to keep the sceptre, one fears to share it, one is irritated by comparisons. Thus *another superior talent* avoided my name in a work on *Literature.* Thank God, esteeming myself at my right value, I have never laid claim to the empire. . . .' This *superior talent* is Mme. de Staël, who is here traduced as guilty (can one believe it ?) of not having mentioned M. de Chateaubriand in this book published before M. de Chateaubriand was known, in this book that M. de Chateaubriand himself commenced his career by attacking in order to make himself known. It staggers one, it makes one incredulous of such absence of mind. The remarks I make on the purely literary chapter might apply equally well to every part of the book. The whole work reveals an almost puerile vanity, which naïvely puts itself before others in everything, which takes from others and assumes to itself the leading rôle, which poses as a victim and puts on airs of generosity. This leprosy of vanity pervades every part of these *Memoirs*, and spoils and compromises the elevated and noble parts of the talent. We men of letters, on first hearing these things read, charmed by the fine bits, were not sufficiently sensible to this capital fault; but the public, less attentive to the workmanship and the details, are not deceived by it, and have not approved of the man as seen through the writer.

The chief difficulty about these *Memoirs* is that, in reading them, one cannot clearly make out what kind of a man one has to do with. Is he a man of good faith, who has overcome all prejudices, an actor retired from the stage, who chats about himself and others, who tells both the good and the bad, and discloses the secret of the comedy? Is he an actor still on the stage, continuing to play a dramatic part with haughtiness and dignity? He is something of both. The mask has partially dropped, but the author resumes it every moment and readjusts it on his face, and whilst he is resuming it, he laughs at it and tries to make believe that he is not putting it on. By these contradictory movements, he characterizes himself

and betrays his secret nature, but he makes himself known from the side he least expected, and we do not thank him for it.

And, for example, is it a man who has shaken off the prejudices of nobility and blood who is speaking? Is he a nobleman sincerely converted to the democratic equality of modern manners? But he begins by unfolding in several pages, at the moment of his birth, his parchments and title-deeds of ancient nobility; it is true that after this genealogical exposition he adds: 'At the sight of my parchments I might very well, if I had inherited my father's and brother's infatuation, believed myself a cadet of the Dukes of Brittany. . . .' But what are you doing at this moment, if not adding a remnant of that *infatuation* (as you call it) to the pretension of being cured of it? That is a double pretension, and the infatuation with which you tax your father and brother was at least more simple.

Is it an *émigré* completely cured of the prejudices of the emigration whom we have to do with, and who, speaking of his campaign of 1792 on the side of the Princes, criticizes it with a philosophical mind? We might be tempted to believe it for a moment, and even M. de Chateaubriand in my opinion goes too far when he says: 'We were very *stupid* no doubt, but at least we had drawn our rapiers. . . .' Meanwhile I turn over a page, and I see that he appears to take up the cudgels for the emigrants: 'People nowadays cry down the emigrants, he says; at the epoch I speak of one adhered to the old examples, and honour counted as much as country'. Once more have we to do with a convinced *émigré* who still believed in his right, or with the *émigré* who calls himself *stupid*, and who appears to be laughing at all he then endured *for the greater glory of the monarchy*. If we are to be truly interested, we must choose between these two inspirations.

I will say the same thing of M. de Chateaubriand as a Royalist in general. Is it a man still faithful to his affections for the past who speaks to us from many a passage of the *Memoirs*, or a man who only holds with his party from a point of honour, whilst considering the object of his fidelity stupid (*bête*, that is his word), and openly telling him so? The contradiction is there all the same, and makes itself felt in the general impression.

And the Christian ? where is he, and are we very sure of having met with him in M. de Chateaubriand, and of holding him ? True, he continually repeats : 'As I believe in nothing, *except religion. . . .*' But this kind of parenthesis, which recurs on every occasion, in or out of season, is too easily set aside, and if we set it aside, what do we discover ? 'Leaving religion out of the question, says M. de Chateaubriand (in a passage where he discusses intoxication and madness), happiness is not to know oneself, and to arrive at death without having felt life '. As a rule, in fact, if we cut out this parenthesis concerning religion, whch is only brought in as it were *pro forma*, we find in M. de Chateaubriand now a gloomy and sinister imagination like Hamlet's, which carries doubt and desolation around it, now an Epicurean and quite Greek imagination, which delights in the most voluptuous pictures, and which in its old age goes so far as to mix up the images of Taglioni with the austerities of the Abbé de Rancé.

In one place, speaking of the death of La Harpe, who, in spite of his well-known faults, was converted before the supreme hour, the words escaped him . '*He did not bungle his end*, I saw him die a brave Christian '. So he might have said of a dramatist . ' He did not bungle his fifth act '. Such words, inadvertently uttered, give much food for reflexion. There are words of a determinant character, says Pascal, by which we judge the mind of a man.

One day, calling to mind that his poem of the Martyrs had been criticized from the point of view of orthodoxy, it slipped from him, in a fit of vanity, to say of the Christians what he so often said of kings · 'Here are these Christians of France, *to whom I have rendered such great services by re-erecting their altars, stupidly* taking it into their heads to be scandalized ! ' That may be read in the *Memoirs*, and one wonders what such a fit of irritation, if it were prolonged, might lead to. The only thing I wish to point out here, is that these contradictions of sentiments are unpleasant and perplexing. We had tried indeed, at the time, to see in them, for want of any other connexion, some sort of poetic unity which we called *artist's unity*, and which embraced in itself all the contradictions, which gathered them as it were into a superb bundle. But the public did not acquiesce in these arti-

ficial views. What remains evident for them, is that one nowhere feels the unity of the man nor the truth of a nature; and in the end this discord becomes intolerable in reading Memoirs.

The poet Gray said of Memoirs in general that, if one were content with writing exactly what one has seen, without affectation, without ornament, without trying to shine, one would have more readers than the best authors. To write in that way of what one has seen and felt, would be indeed to leave behind one of those simple and rare books, which are so very scarce. But to do that, it would be necessary to strip off all personal affectation, all pretension, not to be gifted with one of those imperious, all-powerful imaginations, which, whether consciously or unconsciously, in many cases take the place of feeling, of judgment, and even of memory. Now, an imagination of this kind is precisely the gift and the glory of M. de Chateaubriand; it is curious to see how incorrectly, in this bright mirror, he has remembered his own former impressions, and how, without exactly willing it, he has substituted for them quite recent impressions. Those who have had in their hands letters of his dating from those past times, in which he related his feelings at the time, have had opportunities of comparing what he said then with what he has said since in his *Memoirs*: nothing is more unlike. I will only mention one little example. In 1802, on a visit to Avignon on business, he made an excursion as far as Vaucluse, and in a letter to Fontanes, dated November 6, 1802, he said: 'I have just come from Vaucluse; I will tell you about it. It is equal to its reputation. *As to Laura the prude and Petrarch the bel-esprit, they spoiled the fountain for me.* I nearly broke my neck trying to climb a mountain. . . .' Now read in the *Memoirs* the passage where he tells of this pilgrimage to the fountain: Petrarch and Laura have all the honours of it; it is nothing but quotations from Petrarch and hymns to Laura's lover: 'In the distance one heard the notes of Petrarch's lute; a solitary *canzone*, escaped from the tomb, continued to charm Vaucluse with an immortal melancholy. . . .' The crime is not very great, but this is the way literature usurps the place of the first truth. What he did there literarily, he must have done almost everywhere for these past periods; he more or less substituted the feelings he

attributed to himself at the moment of writing, for those he really had at the moment he tells of.

He did this to a slight extent, I believe, in the romantic parts, he obviously did it in the historical parts. So, in his retrospective view of the first Revolution, and in the portraits he traces of the men of 1789, he speaks not according to what he saw and felt at the time, but from his feeling at the moment of writing the work.

And not only judgments and sentiments does he modify. Instead of recalling, if possible, and simply disclosing the sensations and impressions he once had, instead of correcting them even if he thinks fit, he mingles with them all he has been able to pick up since, and that forms a jingle of erudition, of historical comparisons ; of personal reminiscences and affected pleasantries, the effect of which is often strange when it is not false.

Though unable to prove to one's own satisfaction this more or less alloy, one feels it a little in reading ; one has a confused impression of it ; and just as in presence of a good portrait of which we have never seen the original, we exclaim : *How like it is* ! we are here tempted, even whilst admiring the touches of talent, to exclaim : 'But that is not possible' ! A very good judge said to me on this subject, and I cannot do better than repeat his words : 'As to the foundation, M. de Chateaubriand remembers the facts no doubt, but he seems to have rather forgotten the impressions, or at least he changes them, and he adds to them after the event ; he overloads. They are the gestures of a young man and the returns of imagination of an old man, or, if he was not an old man at the time he wrote, of a middle-aged politician, who returns to his youth in the intervals of his game, so that there is a blending, and at times the effect one receives is a double one ; it is true and false at the same time'. One might say as much of most Memoirs prematurely born and composed with a view to a present effect.

Not entirely trusting my own impressions on these *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, I wished for enlightenment by consulting others' impressions, and I gathered a certain number of these judgments, which are various, but none of which contradicts the other. In Paris true criticism is formed in conversation : by taking a ballot of all opinions, and intelligently ascertaining the result of this

ballot, the critic might compound his most complete and correct sum of judgment. Here again is a criticism which is not mine, but which I steal from one of the masters of to-day:

'I am reading the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, and am out of patience with all these grand poses and draperies. It is a work *without morality*. I do not mean to say that it is immoral, but I cannot find in it that good substantial moral that one likes to read even at the end of a fable or a fairy-tale. So far that proves nothing and is not intended to prove anything. Soul is absent, and I who liked the author so much am grieved that I cannot like the man. I do not recognize him, I do not divine him when I read him, and yet he is not behindhand in showing himself off; but always in a costume that was not made for him. When he is modest he is so in a way that makes you think he is proud, and so with everything. One knows not whether he has ever loved anything or anybody, so empty does his soul become with affectation! That mania for exhibiting the contrast between his misery and his opulence, his obscurity and his celebrity, appears to me puerile in its profundity, almost silly; the word is out. I can pardon his being unjust, furious, absurd when speaking of the Revolution, which he could not have understood in its entirety, and the details of which he did not witness. I pardon him the more readily because when he pours out his bile, I at least recognize the physiognomy of the Breton nobleman, and I feel that he is alive; but at all other times he is a phantom; and a ghost in ten volumes is, I am afraid, rather long. And yet, in spite of the general affectation of the style, which corresponds to that of the character, in spite of a studied and spurious simplicity, in spite of an abuse of neologisms, in spite of everything I dislike in this work, I find again every moment great, simple, fresh beauties of form, certain pages which are by the greatest master of this century, and which not one of us, coxcombs formed in his school, could ever write, though we did our best'.

Observe once more, that the writer of this criticism is one of the most powerful in talent and the most celebrated of our days.[1] By the nature of the faults he discerns so well in the *Memoirs* and by the beauties of the first order which he points out, he appears to me to sum up the whole truth on the entire work.

It is especially in reading the first part, so full of interest, those scenes of home, of childhood and early youth, where the impressions, idealized no doubt, are not yet sophisti-

[1] It was just George Sand, in a familiar letter.

cated and still sincere, it is at this opening that we feel how great a charm the story might have possessed if it had been more simple, more connected, less staccato, bearing with it the naturally elevating and pathetic passages. But soon one of two things cancels the pleasure: either a fantastic and tasteless imagination, or an enormous and puerile vanity. Vanity in the first place and, above all, inconceivable in such a degree in so noble a mind, the vanity of a child or a savage; a personality that prides itself on being disenchanted, and makes itself the centre of all, which could not be satiated by absorbing the universe, which finds everything and everybody in its way, especially Bonaparte; which compares itself with all the great people it comes across in its way, measures itself with them, and finds itself their equal; which ever and again asks itself this question, which should be left to others: '*What would this century have been without me and my writings*'? which also puts to itself this other more coquettish question, the conceit of which raises a smile: 'Had some beautiful woman divined the invisible presence of René'? which thinks itself privileged in respect of griefs and misfortunes; which has moments of astonishment and tenderness at itself and its own fortunes; which, on every human mischance which it experiences, says: 'That can only happen to me'! which lastly, in its fits of wrath, gives vent to burlesque braggings and boastings, side by side with divine words! in one place, for example, after some admirable words on Greece and Fénelon, he says: 'If Napoleon had settled accounts with the Kings, he had not settled with me'. Immediately after a sentiment worthy of Sophocles, there will come a phrase à la Cyrano.

Imagination besides too often spoils our pleasure, even the pleasure which it has given us; an unforeseen imagination, fantastic, exorbitant, grand certainly and often enchanting, regaining at will youth and freshness, but uneven, staccato, full of abrupt and jolting movements: the wind suddenly shifts, and we find ourselves at the other end of the horizon. In many cases one has a difficulty in seizing the very slender thread which unites the present idea to the reminiscence, to the souvenir which the author calls up. He seeks an effect, and he produces it very often, and very often he misses it. A singular kind

of pleasantry circulates through a great part of these *Memoirs* and allows itself every licence, a sort of strongly-accented and highly-flavoured pleasantry, without charm or lightness. There is nothing natural or pleasing in M. de Chateaubriand's gaiety ; it is a sort of *humour* or fantasy which plays against a sombre background, and his laughter is very often discordant. The author is not simply and frankly gay, or at least he is gay after a Celtic rather than a French fashion ; his gaiety, as it finds expression in his writing, sometimes appears forced and far-fetched. It denies itself no repulsive images, but seems rather to revel in them ; it is a charnel-house, grave-digger's cheerfulness, like that of the scene in *Hamlet*.

It would not be difficult, if we had space, to verify these general remarks by a large number of examples ; and, in order to remain within the truth, we might quote in parallel columns some of those phrases which seem to flow from golden lips, and which recall antique beauty with modern sentiment, that is to say the kind of beauty proper to M. de Chateaubriand, that in which he is truly a creator. One of those phrases recurs to me at this moment ; when revisiting Venice in 1833 he makes a dreamy excursion to the Lido, and finds the sea again, *that fatherland which travels with us* : 'I addressed, he says, words of love to the waves, my faithful companions. I plunged my hands into the sea ; I raised its sacred water to my lips without tasting its bitterness'. Oh ! poet, how we would like to do the same with the waters that you pour out for us ! But, for that, you would have to be one of those poets who are vast, simple and deep as nature.

M. de Chateaubriand is only the first writer of the imagination who opens the nineteenth century ; as such, he remains till now more original than any of those who have followed, and, I think, greater. From him flow as from their source the beauties and the defects which we find again all around us, and even in those we admire most : he opened the double door through which thronged the good and bad dreams. Much might still be said of these *Memoirs*, taking them in detail and in their different parts. I would like to have spoken of the Charlotte episode and of Chateaubriand the romantic : Chateaubriand the politician would also demand a separate study. One conclusion appears to me henceforth indisputable : among the differ-

ent portraits and statues of himself he has tried to give us, M. de Chateaubriand only succeeded in producing a single perfect work, an ideal of himself in which the qualities with the defects appear fixed in time and set in an immortal attitude—that is *René*.

THE ABBÉ DE CHAULIEU[1]

Monday, March 26, 1850.

HERE we have a few new Letters of the poet Chaulieu, just published: they will not add much to his reputation and do not quite answer to the idea which his renown for amiability calls up. Not that I repent of having read them; we men of the profession find our profit and are able to glean where the more busy public find less to satisfy them. On my own behalf I therefore thank the editor of these Letters for the present he has made us, and take the liberty of regretting at the same time that he has not devoted a little attention to the details of this publication, in order to make it more exact and complete. After all, to bring us back to the presence of the Abbé de Chaulieu, is in itself to procure us a happy and agreeable meeting.

We are already so remote from those times, that, in order to form a correct judgment of a man, of an author who lived in them, it is not always enough to read his productions, one should besides see them in their right place, and put together the whole epoch and the whole existence of the person himself; in a word, we should devote to them a little of the study and effort which we give to the authors of antiquity. I will attempt it here for a moment in the case of the Abbé de Chaulieu. He was born at Fontenay-en-Vexin, in 1639, and he adds another name to the already so brilliant list of Norman poets. Saint-Simon, who disputed everybody's nobility, disputed Chaulieu's: He called him 'a man *of very small origin*, but of much wit, some letters, and plenty of audacity'. On this question of genealogy, the Abbé d'Estrées already proved in 1745, that the family of the

[1] *Unpublished Letters.* By the Abbé de Chaulieu, preceded by a Notice by M. le Marquis de Bérenger (1850).

Anfries, lords of Chaulieu, were of the sword before they were of the gown (a circumstance reputed honourable), and served on a good footing in the time of Charles VII. It seems that they originally came from England. Be that as it may, Guillaume de Chaulieu, the future Abbé, was son of a Maître des Comptes of Rouen. He went to Paris to study, at the Collège de Navarre, and there became intimate with the sons of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld (author of the *Maxims*), themselves men of wit. Very little more is known of Chaulieu's early years. If he had been diligent and studious, he was of an age to make his way in the height of the reign of Louis XIV; but, his genius being of a quite haphazard and occasional nature, it was not till the last years of that reign and the beginning of the eighteenth century that he opened out, and showed himself quite what he was; we must imagine him to be already white-haired when he crowned himself with flowers, at the age of nearly eighty.

Meantime this long life must have been spent in many things. Pleasures, society, ambitious attempts to push his fortunes absorbed a good part of it. The Letters published by M. de Bérenger show us Chaulieu at the age of thirty-six (1675), well launched into the best society, intimate and familiar with the Bouillons, the Vendômes, the Marsillacs, and, in the first dawn of his ambition, accompanying M. de Béthune, then envoy extraordinary to Poland. The illustrious Sobieski had just been elected King of Poland; his wife was a d'Arquien. The Marquis de Béthune, who was married to a sister of the new Queen, was sent to congratulate the King his brother-in-law. This idea of a French queen, a simple maiden of quality, this sudden good fortune had excited people's imaginations. Chaulieu thought he saw there an opening to a career, through the friendship which the Marquis de Béthune bore him. During these travels he writes to his sister-in-law, Mme. de Chaulieu, and sends her accounts of receptions, carousings, feastings and junketings without number. He speaks of the Poles as people were in the habit of speaking of them at that time, that is to say of a kind of barbarous, semi-Asiatic nation, whose smallest peculiarities of manners and costume were of interest:

'You can have no idea of the majesty and the fierce look

of the Poles, half of which they owe to their beards, half to long gowns and their sabres. I have never seen anything so calculated to inspire terror. The tall Girard would be a dwarf beside the smallest of them. I assure you that it is an agreeable spectacle to see a hundred of them dressed in all sorts of colours, with sashes of plaited silk to which hangs a sword compared to which mine, so vaunted by the Abbé de Marsillac, would look like a canivet (a little knife). It is the fashion in this country to have Polish gentlemen. I engage four of them on my arrival at Warsaw. We give them forty sous a week for food, keep, salary and all the rest of it. I see very well that it would be a folly to send for my people here. . . . Yet I am ruined here. One finds nothing at all in Poland'.

Hardly arrived, he accompanies Sobieski in an expedition to Ukraine :

'At length we leave in three days for the army. It is a pity that it is not one of our little gentlemen (doubtless the young Princes of Vendôme) who is serving his apprenticeship under the great Sobieski and making this campaign in my place. They could not have a better master. . . . On Monday he gave audience to the envoy of the Tartars ; he (the envoy) came to assure him of his master the Khan's friendship, and of his desire to arrange a good peace between the Turk and himself. I will keep a copy of the letter for you which he brought, and treat you some day to a piece of eloquence *à la tartare*'.

They soon return from that expedition to Ukraine, the ambassador and he, *covered with glory and laurels*, or rather *with mud and laurels :*

'We found the Queen here very well recovered from her last illnesses, and in a splendour of dress not to be equalled. The contrast was as great as possible with the state in which we had returned from Ukraine, from M. de Béthune down to the meanest of us. Our clothes are insufficient to cover human nakedness. We had to remain a week with all the ladies of the Court in this deplorable state, because our things are in the Queen's wardrobe, at Leopold. She sent an usher of her chamber there to-day to get us out of our rags, and because M. de Béthune often scandalizes all the maids of honour by the worn and torn condition of his clothes'.

This mixture of luxury and indigence shows through in more than one place. In spite of the circumspection which Chaulieu observes in his correspondence, we can see very distinctly his aim and his disappointments. He had expected to be appointed Polish Resident or Chargé

d'Affaires in Paris; M. de Béthune supported his claims with the King and Queen; but the latter protected a certain M. Letrens who was doing the business of Poland in Paris without a title and without the requisite qualifications. The Queen held her ground obstinately, and M. de Béthune did not press his point, in order not to offend her. Chaulieu was able henceforth to form a true estimate of the value of Court protections and promises:

'Everybody, he writes to his sister-in-law, follows his own interest, without thinking of that of others; services and benefits are, my fair lady, only very poor claims for expecting people to do a thing which may clash, in the remotest way, with the least of their designs. I should like to be three years younger and to have known as much of the things of the world as I do now. I see very well that I lived till then in a state of innocence, and I thought everybody's heart was like my own; I was greatly mistaken, but I cannot be sorry for it, because I judged the souls of men by my own. This affair has fallen through: it is the third within the last six months. No matter! fortune and my friends will do better when they please. I am day by day becoming a philosopher, and, provided I have the pleasure of seeing you again and of unloading my heart to you, the rest I count as nothing. I cannot hide from you that my heart is big with things which it would be no good to write, and which I do not wish to entrust to paper'.

We cannot be surprised, then, if these letters written from Poland contain nothing of greater interest: it is possible that others, in which he said more, were written in cipher, and we have here perhaps only the least private. They suffice to disclose already in Chaulieu a feeling of pride which he had ever after, which Saint-Simon called audacity, but which deserved a better name, and which had its origin in that reflective sentiment by which an independent spirit judges of itself and others. Chaulieu tells us somewhere that he had all his life a *mania* for respecting *personal merit* alone; it was a mania, indeed, in the society and the age in which he lived. This schooling he had in Poland was of much help to him and completed his maturity: 'At least, if I have profited nothing by my travels, he wrote, you will find me returned with a good opinion of myself, and a pride which will appear extraordinary to you in a man whose affairs are not in a better condition than mine'. This pride is decidedly one of Chaulieu's characteristics; he himself admits to having carried it rather far:

Avec quelques vertus, j'eus maint et maint défaut:
Glorieux, inquiet, impatient, colère,
Entreprenent, hardi, très-souvent téméraire,
Libre dans mes discours, peut-être un peu trop haut.

Although he had failed in attaining to his positive aim, Chaulieu returned loaded with presents and distinctions, with a ring on his finger which the King had detached from his own to give him at the moment of departure. The feastings continue all along the return route: the Ambassador and the Abbé do not weary of holding their own against the great lords of the country and getting drunk *à la polonaise*, to sustain the honour of the King their master. But Chaulieu, who hardly needed this apprenticeship in deep drinking, returns above all with that consummate experience which the life of society is unable to give one, and which can only be gained in the manipulation of a first transaction, even when it has not been successful.

To be an Epicurean, when one is so with art, is no bar to being clever, and Chaulieu proves it from this day forward. To make up for his failure in Poland, he makes up his mind to attach himself entirely to the young Princes of Vendôme, and so effectually insinuates himself into their favour by his cleverness, that he becomes absolute master of their affairs, the steward and arbiter of their pleasures. These young Princes, who had the blood of Henri IV and Gabrielle d'Estrées in their veins, combined the qualities and the vices of the two in the highest degree. As children they had begun by being heroes in war, and at all times they were *debauchés* rather than voluptuaries. We are conscious, in more than one passage, that Chaulieu (their senior by fifteen years) is judging them; but he is judge and accomplice at the same time, and, whilst no doubt trying to guide them on a few points, he lets himself go with them on all the others. He accompanies the Duc de Vendôme to his Government in the Provence; he assists at all the fêtes and the monstrous galas which the province does itself the honour to offer the prince. Under this heading of banquets and victuals, he enters into details worthy of Gargantua, which to us appear in bad taste, but which were only in accordance with the taste of the time People ate more then than they do now, and above all they talked more about eating and without any shame. A vein of Rabelais still cir-

culated, and it flowed entire in Chaulieu. Intoxication however did not go too much to his head. Alluding to the solemn parades which are gone through on those ceremonious days, and to all those dull performances of the human comedy, he wrote to his sister-in-law: 'If *Don Quixote* is at Rouen, *Trivelin prince* is here; those are farces which people of good sense must indeed despise; but one must go with the stream, and since the world is nothing but a comedy, one must take up the rabbit's tail and the wooden sword like the rest of them'. This same letter written from Aix in the Provence, and with a frank Gallic crudity, contains a few gallant conversations which are more than risky. Chaulieu intimates to his sister-in-law that he would be in a fair way, if he stayed ever so short a time, of having all kinds of successes. Mme. de Grignan, the wife of the Lieutenant-General, has united all the ladies of the province at her house, and he seems to think, a little boastfully, that in this assembly all he need do is to throw the apple: 'The Governor's favourite, he says, with the reputation of a bel-esprit and a courtier, would soon be a dangerous rival here'. He gives us a specimen of one of the pleasantries *à la provençale* which he addresses to one of those ladies; the jest appears to us, we must confess, of an extreme enormity, and one reads it twice over before daring to comprehend. But why should one be surprised? it was not for the public that Chaulieu wrote these intimate letters, and one has but to open the Correspondences of the time and the manuscript Collections of historical songs, and find that that was the habitual tone of men in the best society, in the grand century.

Let us not be under any illusion in this regard; there are two ages of Louis XIV: the one noble, majestic, magnificent, prudent and orderly even to austerity, decent even to solemnity, represented by the King in person, by his Court orators and poets, by Bossuet, Racine, Despréaux; there is another age forming so to say an undercurrent, or flowing like a river under a wide bridge, extending from one Regency to the other, from that of the Queen-Mother to that of Philippe of Orleans. Mazarin's beautiful and witty nieces had a large share in transmitting this wit from one Regency to the other, the Duchesses de Mazarin, de Bouillon and all their society; Saint-Évremond and

the voluptuaries of his school; Ninon and those she formed around her, the malcontents and scoffers of every party. As the reign advanced and the monarch became more and more austere, this vein, driven back, only re-entered and spread internally. Disappointed ambitions, expectant ambitions, found compensation in freedom of wit and pleasures; and these pleasures were what they always become very soon, what they were bound to be above all in an epoch of immense inequality, when the check of publicity did not exist: they were veritable bacchanals. We may say, for example, of the orgies at Anet or the Temple, at the Vendômes', and of the wit which was expended there, what La Bruyère said of Rabelais: 'It is a monstrous assemblage of refined and ingenious morality and an unclean corruption: where he is bad, he goes far beyond the worst, he is the delight of the rabble; where he is good, he is even exquisite and excellent, he may be the most delicate dish'. That is still the truest definition of the morals as well as the wit of Chaulieu and La Fare. Chaulieu will live less as a poet than because he is one of the most characteristic figures in whom two epochs join; he marks the connexion between one Regency and the other; he had received the afflatus of the first, the free and bold spirit of the Epicureans of the time before Louis XIV, and he lived long enough to give the accolade to Voltaire.

I have said that there are two aspects of the age or reign of Louis XIV, the apparent, imposing and noble aspect, and the reverse, the substance, more natural, too natural, which we should not look too closely into; we will only add that at a certain hour, at the finest moment of the reign, two men showed, in more than one work, what genius was capable of doing by uniting the two tones, by defying the solemn, and making nature speak openly and worthily: these two men are Molière and La Fontaine.

Chaulieu took after the latter, he took especially after Chapelle; but if he went further than either in respect of careless rhyming, he ruled his life better than either, and, with the exterior of an Anacreon, he always knew what he was about. In my eyes he represents Rabelais' cherished monk, the real Prior of Thélème. In one of the new letters we see him, after a journey into Nivernais,

arriving at an estate called Les Bordes ; one should hear his description of the delights of the place : 'One eats four times a day ; one sleeps twenty hours, and there is not a bed that is not made by Slumber's own hands ' And then he enters into all the details about the advantages of the place, and about certain comforts of the *garde-robe* which he describes at great length to his sister-in-law with an enthusiasm, a sort of lyric verve which I must refrain from quoting ; we have become too squeamish for that. Those who, judging by a superficial reading, might imagine Chaulieu to be a poet of the petty Abbé kind, perfumed and mythological, would be much mistaken : he was a brilliant and rich nature, a facile and careless genius, such as he has been very well described by Voltaire in his *Temple du Goût*. The same Voltaire shows him in another place a little *vainglorious by* nature–

> Ne me soupçonne point de cette vanité
> Qu'a notre ami Chaulieu de parler de lui-même.

He had a high heart, as La Fare said to him, and in talent—

> Le don d'imaginer avec facilité.

That was his distinctive trait as a society poet and a successor to Voiture. That *sparkling* imagination which seized him when feasting and in company, sometimes forsook him, and he had *his floods and neaps* like every genius. He often enough showed ill-humour, we are assured, and was not always pleasant ; but when he was, his amiability was broad and overflowing. Besides, he governed his life, as I have said, and for that reason he was a master and an arbiter who commanded a hearing in his society. He thought with Hamilton [1] that, 'provided that reason preserves its sway, all is permitted ; that it is the manner of using pleasures that makes the voluptuary or the debauchee ; that voluptuousness is the art of using pleasures with delicacy and enjoying them with sentiment '.—' I am made of sentiments and voluptuousness ', he said.— Such maxims imply the possession of leisure in a large degree, a super-refinement, and quite an art which our times of struggle and labour can hardly comprehend.

[1] Or the author, whoever he was, of the Dialogue on *la Volupté* inserted in Hamilton's Works.

In an Epistle to his friend La Fare, in which he gives a life-like portrait of himself with his qualities and faults, Chaulieu shows himself positive, however, in one essential character :—

Noyé dans les plaisirs, mais *capable d'affaires*,

he says. That brings us back to his position in the Vendôme establishment, and to a few unpleasant words of Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon bluntly accuses Chaulieu of having abused the Duc de Vendôme's confidence, and to his own advantage. The two brothers de Vendôme, the Duke and the Grand Prior, had long lived in common, and Chaulieu was their favourite, their counsellor; that was a grave responsibility in the midst of such irregularity. At one time this close union of the two brothers came to an end; the Duke parted from the Grand Prior, and Chaulieu followed the fortunes of the latter. Without trying to enter into an explanation impossible at this distance, it may be remarked merely that if Chaulieu was in the wrong, he shared his guilt entirely with the Grand Prior, and that the latter and he acted in concert, must we say in complicity? The intimacy of Chaulieu and the Grand Prior was never denied at any period. Chaulieu hardly ever left for a single day, in his last years, that prince whom he called his benefactor and his friend, and with whom he had lived for forty years in the lap of confidence and intimacy: 'This kind of marriage of propriety, though not a sacrament, he said, has the same force as the others, and can almost as little be dissolved'. In Saint-Simon's serious accusation we must make allowance for the noble writer's well-known aversion for people of *humble origin*, added to that which he felt for poets and rhymesters. Chaulieu, by his freedom of speech, had very soon made many enemies. As soon as it became known that he wrote poetry, people were afraid of him; he was the terror of fools; not a song nor a vaudeville circulated in society but was ascribed to him; he complains of it himself. When the divorce of the Vendôme brothers became public, malice could not fail to seize hold of it at his expense. It began the attack against Chaulieu in spiteful couplets which may be read in the manuscript collection of songs

called *Recueil de Maurepas* (vol. xxv, p. 424), in which so many infamies of every kind are hidden.[1]

It is time, I think, to make a remark: it is that our age, though it has been so much abused, has its good sides. There were many things in the past and in what is called the grand century which we look back upon with regret, there are still more things to be forcibly rejected. The most honourable people did and said things then which would not now be tolerated. Not that we are any better at bottom: taken in the mass, men are alike at all times, and they generally give themselves the pleasure of doing almost all the mischief they can. But at least we do it differently to-day, above all with more constraint and reserve. Public morals have gained in more than one respect; the great light of publicity, in its circulation, has cleaned out many centres of corruption and many Augias' stables. One can hardly imagine at the present time what the prodigious lives of bastard princes like the Vendômes were at that period; they were veritable social monstrosities, in the midst of which resided all forms of licence and abuse, and that other abuse, that last monstrosity among all the rest, the Abbé courtier and parasite. One may say what one pleases and try to disguise names, that was more or less, at the beginning, the part played by Chaulieu:—

Accort, insinuant, et quelquefois flatteur,

he admits it himself.

La Bruyère, residing in the house of the Condés, utilized that shelter to make the observations of a moralist and philosopher. Mlle. De Launay, a dependent in the house of the Duchesse du Maine, felt her position, and also made use of it for observation. Chaulieu employed his position at the Vendômes', and profited by it in a positive sense, singing the while with his glass in his hand.

Would the reader know how an evening, any evening, was spent in this so spirituel fine world?

'M. le Marquis de Béthune, writes Chaulieu to his sister-in-law, is plunged into the furies of bassette (a card game). He is lost to us. He is always at the Countess' (de Soissons). Yesterday he won three hundred pistoles. The number of

[1] The voluminous *Recueil de Maurepas* may be found in the manuscript department of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

actors amounted to seventeen or eighteen, among whom shone M. and Mme. de Bouillon, and M. de Vendôme, who, going at his ordinary pace, lost at least the half of the Hôtel de Vendôme. I am not sorry. It is a just retribution of God, who is punishing him for all the wicked jests he made on the illness of M. de Chaulieu (the Abbé's brother). . . .'

And we are given the details of these jests, which are of the crudest. Another time it is the Grand Prior, who publicly takes on again a mistress whom he had discarded shortly before, to the knowledge and in sight of all Paris, and who makes a ridiculous display of herself; but that kind of thing is seen at all times. Ambition was hidden under these irregularities, and sometimes a thing that passed for pure folly was the outcome of deep calculation. Of such a nature was a certain fête given, at the Castle of Anet, to Monseigneur, son of Louis XIV (September, 1686). The King was ill at the time as the result of an operation, and declined to appear. It was thought therefore that the fête might take place without his being too much displeased, and at the same time, it was already a matter of interest to please the heir presumptive, who was perhaps very soon to succeed to the throne. This time it is Chaulieu's friend La Fare who, in his curious Memoirs, will give us the explanation:

'Although the King was really in danger, he did not wish people to think so. So, this malady did not prevent M. de Vendôme, the Abbé de Chaulieu and me, in order to amuse Monseigneur at Anet, from contriving to give him a fête, with an opera for which Campistron, a poet of Toulouse in the pay of M. de Vendôme, wrote the words, and Lully, our common friend, composed the music. This fête cost M. de Vendôme a hundred thousand livres, who had no money to spare, and as M. the Grand Prior, the Abbé de Chaulieu and I each had our mistress at the Opera, the malicious public said we had made M. de Vendôme spend a hundred thousand francs to amuse us and our demoiselles; but we certainly had higher aims than that'.

These *high aims*, once more, were no doubt to please the Dauphin who was expected to reign, and to place the stakes on his head. Dangeau, who was at the fête, and who does not fail to tell of it in his *Journal*, seems to have had no suspicion of what was on the cards. But subsequent events baffled these expectations. Monseigneur reigned

neither then nor since ; the King was angry with Messieurs de Vendôme for this fête, and Chaulieu perhaps had to make up his expenses by a few of those dubious accounts which now form a blot on his memory. The wretched satirical couplets, of which I have spoken, belong to this time.

This mistress he had at the Opera, and whom he celebrated in song, was Mlle. Rochois. He had another mistress in society, a very agreeable woman and one of the most distinguished at the time, Mme. d'Aligre, née Turgot, the same that La Bruyère celebrated in one of his most flattering portraits. This portrait looks very strange in La Bruyère's book, and in respect of form is quite like a page in a modern book. It is entitled *Fragment*, and begins abruptly with several dots, in this way : '. . . He said that wit in this fair lady was a well-set diamond. And continuing to speak of her, he added : It was like a shade of reason and of charm which engages the eyes and the heart of those who speak to her ; one knows not if one loves or admires ; she has in her the making of a perfect friend, and she is also capable of leading you further than friendship '. And the eulogy continues in this delicate tone. I know not whether Mme. d'Aligre led La Bruyère further than friendship ; as to Chaulieu, who possessed, lost and reconquered her by turns, he celebrated her and her charm, her sparkling wit, her brilliant vivacities and her infidelities even, in a manner which forms a piquant contrast to La Bruyère's shaded portrait, though not in disagreement with it. Without pretending to count Chaulieu's amours, it is impossible, as soon as one touches upon this heading, to ignore the passion of his old age for the spirituelle Mlle. De Launay, the memory of which she has consecrated in her Memoirs, and which is attested by some pretty letters of Chaulieu which are usually joined to them. These letters, full of feeling, of grace, of strong esteem for so rare a personal merit which had been ill-used by fortune, do honour to Chaulieu's heart as well as to his imagination. Lemontey, who can only think of a dry and epigrammatic jest on the subject, was insensible to their charm, nor does he seem to have appreciated the noble character of the lady to whom they were addressed. Chaulieu, even in the most advanced old age, thought like a wise man that one should allow scope

for illusions, create and encourage the charm as soon as it is ready to come into existence, and prolong it as much as possible :

'You know, he wrote to Mlle. De Launay, 'that we decided the other day that chimeras should have a place among the projects of men. . . . Take my advice, prolong the charm instead of making it cease. Wisdom and reason are often more inclined to preserve pleasing illusions and to prolong an attachment as true and tender as that which I feel for you, than to follow a dry and barren truth. As soon as the charm is over what is left of the opera of *Armida*, except the ruins of a palace, and a stale smell of extinguished lamps ?'

That is Chaulieu as we conceive him and as we like him, the man who himself needs, in order to charm us, a little of that illusion which hides the back of the stage and the side scenes of everything. From the point of view of literature and poetry, we should only look at Chaulieu as he appears here, in his old age, when he has become quite an honest man, seated under his trees at Fontenay or in the shade of his chestnut trees at the Temple. Thus he shone in his classical frame before Saint-Simon's revelations. Old age, which ordinarily enfeebles talent, rather improved Chaulieu's. In the midst of gaiety and pleasures, he had rhymed and sung a thousand foolish and pleasing trifles, dear to the society around him, but as superficial as the occasions which gave rise to them, and all the charm of which has long evaporated. When the gout came, and a semi-retreat, his soul was raised, his notes became stronger, and he found a few accents at least which deserve to live. Four or five of his pieces only should be read, and he would gain by this restriction : *Fontenay*, *la Retraite*, his *Portrait* to La Fare, a few lines on the *gout*, a few others on *death*, and that is all.

La Fare and Chaulieu are not usually separated, and I would not care to part them here, for they complete one another, and that in certain respects more worthy of reflection than one supposes. We could speak at some length of La Fare. As a poet he counts for little ; he began poetry late in life. A disciple of Chaulieu, one accorded him in his day less fire and more softness, we should now say more feebleness. But he left some *Memoirs*, which are serious and interesting, showing a firm, elevated, independent judgment, and such as to make

him rank among the first of the enlightened minds of the time. The preamble reminds me a little of those of Sallust's Histories: like that dissolute Roman whom he may have had in his mind for more than one reason, La Fare begins by laying down a few principles of morality and philosophy; but he puts them with a quite Epicurean clearness, boldly starting with a word of Rabelais. These first pages contain in a small compass the results of much reflection and experience. He views his century as a whole, and in its different vicissitudes of mind and morals, as we should not have supposed possible at that date, in a man who sees it at so close a range, so near the muzzle as it were. La Fare wrote about 1699. Louis XIV, with his principle of Asiatic absolute monarchy, is judged without any illusion; the various faults of his statesmanship are indicated with a rare good sense. It has been said that La Fare had the tone of a frondeur; I cannot find it. He is severe, but not superficial nor unjust. He has his solid reasons for everything, and takes an exact measure of his fellow-men. Even to his personal enemies, such as Louvois, he gives all their due. The Marquis de La Fare, born in 1644, and therefore younger than Chaulieu by five years, entered military service at an early age; he started in his career with all sorts of advantages: 'My face, which was not unpleasing, he says, though I was not in the first rank of good-looking men, my manners, my disposition, and my wit which was pleasant, formed a whole which pleased the world pretty well, and few men were better received at their entry. . . .' That is the way gentlemen formerly spoke of themselves, without either too much self-glorification nor too much self-depreciation, which is only another form of vanity. It was a long way from this first La Fare, starting life with so many advantages, and the man whom Saint-Simon describes towards the end, of an enormous size, a great gourmand, half apoplectic, sleeping on all occasions, and (what was surprising) waking up clear so as to be able to resume the conversation where it was necessary. Thus had debauchery, it must be confessed, and idleness much more than old age transformed this too practical Epicurean, this man otherwise of so delicate a wit, with so excellent a judgment, who had fought brilliantly at Condé's side at Senef, and in his youth had deserved the confidence of Turenne. A

letter from the Chevalier de Bouillon to Chaulieu (1711), in which he relates in what a deplorable bacchic state he had found La Fare when he went to see him, completes the picture: 'If you love him, writes the Chevalier to Chaulieu, you will return immediately and see if something cannot be done. Between you and me, I think he is quite lost'. In many passages of his Memoirs, La Fare deplores the decline of gallantry and the invasion of bad manners, just as one might do in our days. He gives a forcible description of the young men of the grand century, who can no longer jest with any wit, who gamble furiously all day and get drunk openly; as a moralist and politician he points out and assigns the causes of this general change at Court. But those who remarked and described this perceptible corruption at the end of the great reign were themselves largely responsible for it. La Fare and Chaulieu are the men in whom one should study this double aspect, that by which they stand out from their time and that by which they are in the very midst of it. La Fare, by reason of the serious and quite political character of his Memoirs, which contrasts so strongly with the end of his life, would lend himself still more than Chaulieu to such a study. As to his character, we may apply to himself what he said of one of the men he judges: 'He was, like the majority of other men, composed of contrary qualities: idle, voluptuous, careless, and fond of repose, but sensible, brave, firm and capable of acting when necessary'. However, with an intellect of the first quality, an excellent sense and brilliant courage, idleness in the end quite got the better of him. We know that Mme. de Coulanges maintained that he had never been in love, not even with Mme. de La Sablière; this love had figured largely among the reasons he had for quitting the service so soon 'He thinks he is in love', said Mme. de Coulanges, 'but it is purely and simply idleness, idleness and again idleness'. His end too well verified this witty prognostic. The prettiest lines he addressed to his friend Chaulieu are likewise on the subject of *idleness*. All this may appear pleasing for a moment in poetry; when it came to reality it was not so attractive, and, as we have seen, the consequences were very sad. One cannot but come to the conclusion that it was very destructive to this delicate intellect to appeal, in justification of an indolence so natural to him, to Chau-

lieu's *reasoned idleness*, and to persist in a doctrine the immediate effect of which is to enervate the heart and to destroy the sinews of the soul. Instead of resisting and holding out against it, he abandoned himself and sank into the abyss. To judge Chaulieu's philosophy in its extreme result, it is enough to point to La Fare, not the slim and elegant La Fare of the little classical editions, but the complete La Fare, the La Fare of history and Saint-Simon.

These are rather serious reflections, which, however, suggest themselves when one is discussing La Fare and Chaulieu. After reading their works and traversing their world, one remains very convinced on one point : namely, that the morals of the Regency period already existed under Louis XIV ; they had for many years existed in a latent state. A simple change on the surface was enough to make them overflow. And the misfortune of the eighteenth century in politics, from Philippe of Orleans the Regent to Mirabeau, was that it could never throw off those morals.

NOTES

Page 9, line 9 from bottom. *Malady of René.* René is Chateaubriand himself and the hero of his romance of that name, which first appeared as part of the *Génie du Christianisme*, and was afterwards published separately.

Page 15, line 8. 'Virgil, who from Homer didst learn to charm, Boileau, Corneille, and Thou whom I dare not name, were your minds only a light spark?'

Page 16, last line but one. 'He had good sense, the rest comes later.'

Page 25, line 4. *Le Mondain*, a satire of Voltaire, which in a semi-serious tone celebrates the advantages of luxury and civilization over savage life.

Page 26, line 4. 'Le superflu, chose si nécessaire.' (*Le Mondain.*)

Page 27, line 1. February Revolution (1848), which brought about the downfall of the July Monarchy.

Page 28, line 20. *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumarchais' famous comedy, first played in April, 1784, amid intense excitement.

Page 28, line 23. *Charles IX, ou l'Ecole des Rois*, by Marie-Joseph Chénier, a tragedy having for its background the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Page 29, line 25. 18 Brumaire an viii (November 9, 1799), date of the overthrow of the Directory and the elevation of Napoleon I as First Consul.

Page 30, line 18. M. le Prince, the great Condé.

Page 30, line 20. Madame, the wife of Monsieur, the Duke of Orleans, the King's brother.

Page 32, line 31. *Louison, Le Moineau de Lesbie*, two comedies by A. de Musset and Armand Barthet respectively, first played at the Théâtre Français in the early part of 1849.

Page 37, last line. *Célimène;* see Molière's *Misanthrope*.

Page 38, last line but two. *Dorine;* see Molière's *Tartufe.*

Page 44, line 30. *Chevalier des Grieux;* see *Manon Lescaut.*

Page 53, line 7. 'O lake, mute rocks, caves, dark forest, spared or perchance made young by time, preserve, fair Nature, at least the memory of this night!'

Page 53, line 21. 'Thus thou didst moan under those deep rocks, thus thou didst dash thyself against their torn flanks; thus the wind cast the foam of thy waters at her adored feet!'

Page 54, line 8. Camargo, a famous dancer, Gaussin, an actress, of Voltaire's time.

Page 54, line 10. 'And there will be Julie of the rippling laughter.' (A. Chénier, *Élégie* XXVIII.)

Page 57, line 13, 14. Cabanis, M. de Bonald; two men of very opposite views. The former, a physician and philosopher, and friend of Mirabeau; the latter, an opponent of all liberal projects, notably the freedom of the press.

Page 57, line 19. *Galimatias double;* double nonsense, i.e. unintelligible both to the writer and the reader or audience. An expression attributed to Boileau, who distinguishes it from *galimatias simple:* nonsense intelligible to the writer but not to the reader.

Page 64, line 33. *Polyeucte faith,* Polyeucte is the hero of Corneille's Christian tragedy of that name.

Page 72, line 19. J.-L. Guez de Balzac (1594–1654), the Malherbe of prose; famous in his day for his letters, very finished in style but of little substance. Not to be confounded with the novelist.

Page 75, line 4 from bottom. 'In a long story, verse is always tedious, however ornamental.'

Page 76, line 23. 'The charm of the expression is better than the thing expressed.'

Page 88, line 29. *La Henriade;* Voltaire's epic poem, the hero of which is Henri IV.

Page 102, line 13. "Not all of them died, but all were struck.'

Page 125, line 28. 'Alas! from all times we see the little suffering from the follies of the great.'

Page 113, line 4. *Prince of the Peace;* the Duke of Alcudia, who brought about the peace with France (1795).

Page 140, line 22. A philosopher of these days: Royer-Collard.

Page 161, line 12 from bottom. *Comte d'Essex;* by Thomas Corneille.

Page 175, line 8. 'Behold my universe, my hope and my gods!'

Page 175, line 29. 'No sooner is she gone, but she is treated as a criminal! She charmed the world, and you punish her for it. . . .'

Page 189, line 5. 'I have songs for all her glories tears for all her misfortunes.'

Page 192, line 20. Balzac; see note on p. 72, l. 19.

Page 228, line 6 from bottom. 'Impertinent babblers, self-styled orators, eager persecutors of better citizens, . . . Frenchmen, this hit I call a warning to readers!'

Page 236, line 6 from bottom. 'Poet, I write to thee to tell thee that I love, that a ray of sunlight has fallen even on me, and that one day of supreme grief and sorrow, the tears I shed made me think of thee.'

Page 238, line 4 from bottom. 'My first poems are those of a child, my second, of a youth.'

Page 240, line 13. 'Created by none, dreamed by Mozart, seen by Hoffmann passing to the sound of music, under a divine flash of his fantastic night, admirable portrait never finished, that Shakespeare in our time might have invented.'

Page 240, line 24. 'Behold him, young and fair, under the sky of France . . . bringing to nature a heart full of hope, loving, beloved of all, open as a flower; so pure and so fresh that the Angel of Innocence might kiss on his brow the beauty of his heart. Behold him, look, divine his life. What lot can one predict for that child of heaven? Love, approaching him, swears to be eternal! fortune thinks of him. . . .'

Page 241, line 6 from bottom. 'Oh! the flower of Eden, why hast thou withered it, heedless child, fair Eve with flaxen hair? . . .

Page 246, line 15. I hoped that I might weep, but I thought I should suffer, on daring to see thee again, spot for ever sacred, O dearest tomb and most obscure, where sleeps a memory!

'What didst thou fear then in this solitude? and why

my friends, did you take me by the hand, when so sweet and old a habit pointed out this path ?

'Behold there those hills, those flowering heaths, and those silvery steps on the silent sand, those amorous paths, filled with whisperings, where her arm entwined me.

'Behold there those pines with their dark foliage, that deep gorge with its carelessly winding paths, those wild friends whose ancient murmur lulled my fairest days.

'Behold there those shrubs where all my youth, like a flock of birds, sings to the sound of my steps ; charming spots, beautiful desert where passed my mistress, did you not await me ?

'Ah ! let them flow, they are dear to me, those tears shed by a still wounded heart ! dry them not, leave on my lashes this veil of the past !

'I come not to cast a useless regret to the echo of these woods, witnesses of my bliss : proud is this forest in its tranquil beauty, and proud is my heart.

'Let him give way to bitter plaints, who kneels and prays at the grave of a friend. All breathes in these spots ; the flowers of graveyards grow not here.

'See ! the moon mounts up through these shadows. Thy glance trembles still, fair queen of the night ; but from the dark horizon thou risest already and spreadest out.

'So from this earth, humid still with rain, rise, under thy rays, all the perfumes of day : thus calm, thus pure, from my tender soul rises my old love.

'Whither have gone the sorrows of my life ? All that has aged me is now very far ; and merely looking at this beloved valley, I become a child again.

'O power of time, O light years ! you carry off our tears, our cries and regrets ; but pity seizes you, and you never trample on our faded flowers.

'All my heart blesses thee, kind comforter ! never could I have thought that one could suffer so much from such a wound, and that its scar could feel so sweet.

'Far from me vain words, frivolous thoughts, wonted shroud of vulgar griefs, that they spread over their past loves that have never loved !

'Dante, why sayest thou that there is no deeper misery than happy memories in days of sorrow ? What grief

dictated to thee that bitter word, that offence to misfortune ?

'Is it then less true that the light exists, and must we forget it the moment it is night ? Is it indeed thou, great immortally sad soul, is it thou who saidst it ?

'No, by this pure torch whose splendour lights me, that vaunted blasphemy comes not from thine heart. A happy memory is perhaps on earth more true than happiness.'

Page 248, last line. 'What say I ? such as he is, the world loves him still.'

Page 262, line 8. 'Example is often but a deceptive mirror ; and the order of Destiny, which fetters our thoughts, is not always written in the things that are past. Sometimes one is wrecked where the other is saved, and what destroys the one preserves the other.'

Page 275, line 6 from bottom. 'I have made kings, but had no desire to be one myself.'

Page 291, line 7. *Daphnis and Chloe:* a Greek pastoral romance, translated by Amyot, and rehandled by Courier.

Page 317, line 11 from bottom. Silvio Pellico; one of the victims of Austrian tyranny; wrote *Le mie Prigioni*, an account of his prison life.

Page 333, line 2. *Lélia;* see George Sand's novel of that name.

Page 343, line 11. 'What I take from my nights, I add to my days ;' from Rotrou's tragedy, *Venceslas*.

Page 355, line 18. Taglioni, the famous dancer.

Page 355, line 18. Abbé de Rancé, the reformer of the La Trappe monastery.

Page 366, line 1. 'With a few virtues, I had many and many a fault : boastful, restless, impatient, choleric, enterprising, bold, very often fool-hardy, free in my talk, perhaps a little too haughty.'

Page 369, line 17. 'Do not suspect me of our friend Chaulieu's vanity of speaking of himself.'

Page 369, line 21. 'The gift of facile imagination.'

Page 370, line 5. 'Steeped in pleasures, but an able business man.'

Page 371, line 26. 'Engaging, insinuating and sometimes flattering.'

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